



P. 2. 02

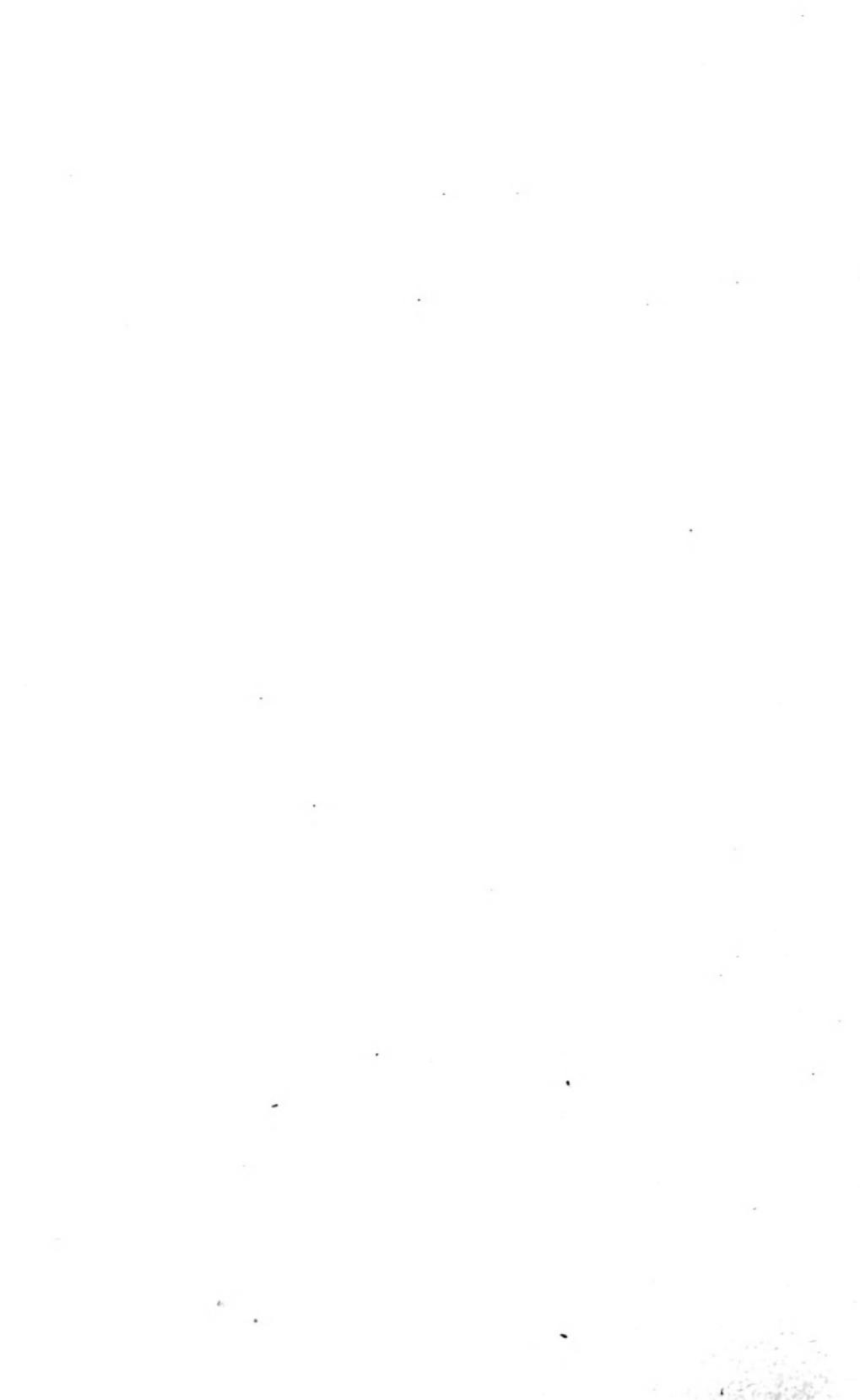
From the Library of
Professor William Henry Green
Bequeathed by him to
the Library of
Princeton Theological Seminary

BS580
M6L9
v.2









THE HEBREW LAWGIVER.

BY
JOHN M. LOWRIE, D.D.,

AUTHOR OF "ESTHER AND HER TIMES," AND "ADAM AND HIS TIMES."
PASTOR OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
FORT WAYNE, INDIANA.

"The Lawgiver of the Jews, no common man."—LONGINUS.

VOL. II.

PHILADELPHIA:
PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION,
No. 821 CHESTNUT STREET.

Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1865, by

THE TRUSTEES OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION,

In the Clerk's Office of the District Court for the Eastern District
of Pennsylvania.

STEREOTYPED BY WESTCOTT & THOMSON.

CONTENTS.

VOL. II.

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
THE DECALOGUE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER.....	7

CHAPTER II.

THE LAWS OF MOSES.....	16
------------------------	----

CHAPTER III.

THE DECALOGUE.....	27
--------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE MOSAIC LAWS.....	35
---------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER V.

SCRIPTURAL LAWS AND THE RIGHTS OF CONSCIENCE.....	52
---	----

CHAPTER VI.

SCENES AT SINAI.....	62
----------------------	----

CHAPTER VII.

THE GOLDEN CALF.....	71
----------------------	----

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INTERCESSION OF MOSES....	82
-------------------------------	----

CHAPTER IX.

	PAGE
IDOLATRY PUNISHED.....	89

CHAPTER X.

VISIONS OF THE DIVINE GLORY DESIRED.....	98
--	----

CHAPTER XI.

THE VAIL UPON THE PROPHET'S FACE.....	108
---------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XII.

THE DIVINE PRESENCE.....	120
--------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIII.

NADAB AND ABIHU.....	130
----------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIV.

AARON'S RESIGNATION UNDER AFFLICITION ; THE BLASPHEMY OF SHELOMITH'S SON.....	139
--	-----

CHAPTER XV.

THE PROVOCATION I. MERIBAH AND THE SIN OF MOSES.....	148
--	-----

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PROVOCATION II. THE SPIES AND THE DESERT'S WAN- DERINGS.....	159
---	-----

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PROVOCATION III. THE LEPROSY OF MIRIAM.....	166
---	-----

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PROVOCATION III. THE REBELLION AND FATE OF KORAH. 173

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WANDERINGS RENEWED ; THE DEATH OF AARON.....	186
--	-----

CONTENTS.

5

CHAPTER XX.

	PAGE
THE BRAZEN SERPENT.....	196

CHAPTER XXI.

BALAAM.....	207
-------------	-----

CHAPTER XXII.

A PSALM OF LIFE.....	226
----------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXIII.

MOSES AS A PROPHET.....	245
-------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXIV.

MOSES AS A THEOLOGIAN.....	268
----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF MOSES.....	283
------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CHARACTER OF MOSES.....	301
-----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXVII.

CHRIST GREATER THAN MOSES.....	321
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE INHERENT CREDIBILITY OF THE WRITINGS OF MOSES....	339
---	-----



THE HEBREW LAWGIVER.

CHAPTER I.

THE DECALOGUE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER.

IF the circumstances attending the giving of the moral law were the most remarkable that ever occurred in the history of any people, they are yet no more peculiar and distinguishing than the law itself. We do not claim that this law declared any new principle, unknown before to the sons of men. On the contrary, we affirm that ever since God had placed man upon the earth, he had been subject precisely to this law. But that these principles of law, though so long recognized, should find so brief yet so excellent expression, is a wonderful thing. We may claim that human writings in all their compass afford no two other compositions so remarkable as the two that are found in the beginning of the Old and of the New Testaments—the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. It seems not too much to pronounce these two compositions inimitable in their perfection by human wisdom; and thus as bearing testimony in themselves to their Authorship. Can any form of devotion be elsewhere produced, so

exactly expressing human wants—omitting nothing yet comprehending nothing superfluous—as in that form of prayer, extemporaneously uttered by Jesus of Nazareth in his sermon on the mount? Can the annals of the race elsewhere produce so brief yet so perfect an expression of law, as in the Decalogue of Sinai? Not a duty can be named that is not here enjoined; not a sin that does not here find its rebuke. That these two brief compositions should be found in the first books of the Old and New Testaments, gives evidence of their genuineness, which feebler men could not possibly imitate. The inquiry, “Where did Moses get this law?” may suggest another, “Where did Jesus find that prayer?” The perfection of truth is above the wisdom of man.

It has been suggested that “the Lord’s Prayer is the Ten Commandments turned into prayer.”* The thought is interesting; but to carry it out will rather reveal some singular analogies between these two compositions, than sustain an idea too ingenious for exact correctness. No doubt both recognize the one Living God alone as the proper object of man’s thoughts in duty and devotion; but give both compositions into the hands of ten persons, and let each write out an independent harmony upon this suggestion, and we cannot think that any two would agree in attempting to reconcile the separate precepts of duty with the separate

* *The Stars and the Angels.*

petitions of devotion, so as to make one the exact counterpart of the other. They begin and end alike—that is, they set forth God as the great object of man's homage; and the aim of human devotion to secure the glory of God, as expressed in the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, is fully kept in view throughout the Decalogue.

It may be noticed that the two grand divisions of these great compositions are alike. The law of Sinai first declares our duty to God, and then exhibits our duty to man. These indeed form indissoluble parts of one law; yet the line of distinction is clear. God, is the great topic of the first table; we must worship him only; by means of his appointment; in the spirit he enjoins; and specially upon the day he has sanctified. Man is the great subject of the second table; the relations we bear to him, the duties we owe to him. We may reasonably believe that these distinct things were written upon separate tables; for there were two stone tablets. So when our Lord Jesus Christ simplifies the Law of the Ten Commandments, reducing the whole to two principles, the first is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God;" and the second is like it, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Mark xii. 29—31. The same great distinction belongs to the Lord's Prayer. The first half speaks of our relations to God; the latter half of our relations to man. His name and his kingdom and his will first occupy our thoughts; and

next we plead that our bodily and spiritual wants may be supplied, and that we may be filled with a right spirit. The same great divisions and distinctions thus belong to both.

We may trace the likeness still farther. If the Ten Commandments can be reduced to two; and upon "these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets:" Matt. xxii. 40: that is if these are the great fundamental principles of all religion and all law; so that a man who truly loves God and man will not be disposed to disregard any commandment; even these two can be farther reduced to one. If a man loves God, he must also love man. The second commandment is like the first; in the last analysis it is included in the first; and the "fulfilling of the law is love." It is true then to remark that the first precept of the Ten Commandments contains in itself the entire Decalogue. All that follows may be needful direction in detail; but the great controlling principle of the law has already been proclaimed: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." He who keeps this command in view, will disregard none that follows. Precisely the same thought is true of the Lord's Prayer. We see in it the same inimitable arrangement that places first that petition in which every other one is involved. No man can reverently and truly offer the first petition of the Lord's Prayer, without being prepared to offer also every petition that follows. If he stumbles not at the

threshold, he may pass prayerfully on. If we can imagine that there is any precept of the Decalogue which an obedient servant of God would wish stricken out, least of all could he wish that the First Commandment should be lost. If we can imagine that any devout man would desire to omit any words of the Lord's Prayer, least of all would he desire to leave out the first petition. What would the Law be without the supreme sovereignty of God; what would prayer be without the hallowing of his holy name! Yet consistently retaining the first, all the rest must follow. Not a single petition can be properly offered unless we desire its fulfilment in entire consistency with the spirit of the first. That God should be honoured in all we ask, and indeed in all that comes to pass, must be the paramount wish of every true worshipper. And he who does desire to hallow the name of God, desires also to promote his kingdom, to know and do his will, and to be dependent upon him in all things.

It detracts nothing from the force of these teachings that the several precepts and petitions cannot be made entirely independent of each other; but that the same thing may be implied in different places. This rather corresponds with what has just been said. And it is through their sterling excellency that the Decalogue is not a series of unconnected precepts, nor the Lord's Prayer a series of unconnected petitions; in which part may

be adopted and the rest disregarded. A vital important principle is first expressed for each, and runs through the whole. He who truly obeys the first commandment of the law, cannot transgress any that follows: he who offers acceptably the first petition is prepared to offer all that succeed it. The same simple principle which makes God sovereign over all, begins them both; and pervades with its spirit all the duties man should do, and all the prayers man should offer.

And it is highly important for us to notice not only the entire consistency of these two inimitable compositions, but the support also which the Lord's Prayer affords to the Decalogue. Men sometimes suppose that dependence upon God relaxes the sinews of human effort; and that those who look for Divine help are less likely to do their personal duty. No such thoughts can legitimately be drawn from these sacred teachings. The Lord's Prayer implies the Decalogue; and no man can enter into its spirit, without at the same time possessing the spirit of the law; which is exactly the same spirit. So in these documents and in all the teachings of the inspired writers, devotion and duty, prayer and law, are not antagonistic to each other, but are fully harmonious; so much so, that devotion cannot exist where duty is neglected. The petitions of every true worshipper bind upon him the more closely every obligation, and awaken his zeal for the discharge of duty. No man can consist-

ently pray, "Thy kingdom come," and yet be indifferent to the laws that rule that kingdom, to the means used to promote it, or to the exertions he should himself put forth. Our blessed Lord assures us that it is worse than in vain to ask for the forgiveness of our sins, unless we exercise a like forgiving temper towards others. And the prayer, "Lead us not into temptation," binds the offerer in earnest consistency to flee from the tempter, and to avoid the very appearance of evil. He only is devotional who also is dutiful.

These are interesting thoughts concerning these two compositions; the most remarkable writings of antiquity, and wonderfully exhibiting the harmony of Moses and of Christ. It is important to notice how fully Christ sustains Moses; and we should not lose sight of the intimate connection between our devotion and our duty. Let us devoutly recognize the Divine origin of these perfect formulas of obedience and dependence; and the Divine wisdom that with so just a discernment of principles has made the first precept, the great commandment; and the first petition, the great prayer; each giving the key-note of interpretation to all that depend upon them. And that in so brief a compass and upon the most difficult subjects of human thought, the first writer of the Old Testament and the first writer of the New, and both claiming that these forms came directly from God and from his Incarnate Son, should present

us with such faultless teachings, may justly be ranked among the manifold and inimitable proofs of the Divine original of these Sacred Books, and of their Divine adaptation to bless the race of man.

It is not our place to disregard any of the evidences of Christianity; nor do we need to set one portion of these evidences in array against any other portion. Rather we may rejoice that the truth gathers its proofs in every direction. The existence of God may be proved from innumerable starting points; these are not conflicting, but harmonious; yet different minds may be pleased by very different lines of proof. So if the evidences of Christianity are innumerable; if lines of light converge from every direction and from unexpected sources, it is no denial of others, that our minds may receive special pleasure from any of these. The intelligent mind of Daniel Webster found satisfactory proof of the Divine mission of Jesus Christ from his great teachings; and he prepared these among other sentences to be placed upon his monument—"The sermon on the mount cannot be a merely human production. This belief enters into the very depth of my conscience. The whole history of man proves it."

We would fully subscribe to the same convictions from these two formulas, the Decalogue and the Lord's Prayer. Neither of these can be merely human productions; and the teachers who furnish

us with these, must be worthy of our confidence. Neither could Moses give us this law, nor Jesus this form of devotion, unless the other claims they make are true. Nor would we need any greater proof of his perfect excellence than to see any one man in the world's history affording us an example in practical life of entire obedience to the Decalogue united to the devotional spirit of the Lord's Prayer. And such an example we have in our Lord Jesus Christ! Even in view of the perfect law of Sinai, none can convict him of sin: and who ever prayed as he did? Happily, though we are bound to follow his example both as to duty and devotion, we, who are conscious of manifold transgressions and deficiencies in both, may find free forgiveness and full acceptance through the shedding of his precious blood.

CHAPTER II.

THE LAWS OF MOSES.

IF we may judge from human experience, nothing is more difficult than to frame for any people an unexceptionable law. With all the knowledge that man has accumulated through so many ages; after so much thought and wisdom have been exercised to settle and simplify the just principles of jurisprudence, the time of our legislators is taken up with abolishing laws that are deemed unwise, and making new ones, soon also to be laid aside; and scarcely any law can come forth so skilfully framed that our learned courts are not obliged to render elaborate opinions upon the just meaning of every important phrase. We all know enough of the wranglings in our legislatures, and of the differing opinions of our judges, to make us confess that to make a law just in all its bearings, and to use clear and wise terms to express the meaning in every sentence, is an exceedingly difficult thing.

We may divide the law given to the children of Israel through the agency of Moses into two distinct parts.

First the essential, immutable principles of all law are expressed in the Ten Commandments. These principles belong to all men and all time; they had governed man since Adam's creation; they must govern as long as any intelligent creature of God lives; and their obligation can never be broken by the rebellion of those subject to them. Of this law a few things shall be said hereafter.

Secondly. The Jewish lawgiver gave his people in the wilderness of Sinai, minute and particular details of law to govern their civil and ecclesiastical affairs.

Many questions have arisen in the minds of men respecting these laws of Moses. Whether these laws themselves were all truly wise; what understanding we may gain of many of them; what obligation they carry forward to these later ages; and what was their origin, in the wisdom of Moses, or in the wisdom of God? are all inquiries of interest to man in these later times.

(1.) As to the wisdom of these laws, it ought to be considered, that the best laws, in detail, for the government of any people, are those best suited to that people. No law should violate the righteous principles that lie at the foundation of all proper government; but it does not follow that the best theory in the abstract, is the best for present practical operation. A system of government well suited to a civilized people, might be ill adapted for the rule of a barbarous race; and a law might

be beneficial for a term of years, and yet be righteously annulled, when the end of its enactment has been secured. If the laws of Moses were well adapted to the people upon whom they were laid, then they were wise. For this is just what we mean by wisdom; the use of means properly adapted to secure a wise end.

(2.) But our understanding of these laws must be imperfect, just in proportion as we fail to comprehend the position and necessities of the people. Many of their laws grew out of their history, their habits, their relations to the nations around them, their exposure to the corruptions of the heathen, and the Divine designs in their separation as a people; and we must know all these things perfectly, before we are competent to decide upon either the excellence or the meaning of the laws. As no man can understand the Confession of Faith of the Westminster assembly of divines, unless he understands previously the antagonistic position of various heresies, which that confession refers to and refutes, in many of its expressions; so the laws of any people take their particular forms and expression from the present circumstances of that people. What seems to us the most trivial thing in the requirements of a Jewish ceremonial law, may yet have been an important line of distinction between them and the corrupt nations about them. We may understand much concerning their laws; and may easily believe that a full understanding

of the reason and aim of the lawgiver in every case, would perhaps sufficiently vindicate every enactment.

(3.) As to the obligations of these laws in subsequent times, more might be said. The foundation principles of law, as embodied in the Decalogue, were essential and immutable, and with these all other laws must harmonize. Dividing the details of subordinate laws into ceremonial and judicial, we may believe that the ceremonial laws of the Jews were peculiar to them, and passed away from the church with the establishment of the Christian dispensation; and that their judicial laws are of still abiding force just so far as the same reasons exist in other nations for the same enactments. The most prominent example of a portion of the judicial law of the Jews still existing, is found in their marriage regulations. Their laws therefore forbidding marriage within certain degrees of affinity, have been usually incorporated into the jurisprudence of modern states; and if we say that this law is not in force, we have no Divine law whatever, to forbid the marriage of the nearest relatives. No good reason can be given why this should not be regarded as the law for the race. And this general principle may commend itself, that where the reason for any law is the same in every age and land, the law remains in force. With many enactments of local interest and transient obligation, the judicial laws of the Jews

furnish many principles and precepts that should be considered as permanent wherever the Bible goes.

(4.) And when we affirm our confidence that these laws had their origin in the wisdom of God, we do not need to lay aside the belief, in full harmony with this, that the intellect, knowledge and wisdom of Moses were fully exercised in preparing some, at least, of them.

As to the moral law, we are told that it was purely of Divine dictation. Every word was spoken by the mouth of God; and every line twice traced by his finger upon the two tables of stone. The Ten Commandments therefore are peculiarly a Divine law. But the Jewish people recognized in the entire laws of Moses a Divine authority they would never have conceded to any human being. Nor is it any objection to the Divine inspiration of Moses, if we can discover in his laws the traces of his peculiar genius, or even the evidences of knowledge acquired in Egypt. The inspiration and authority of Moses would not be invalidated by any proof that he used the teachings of former times, adopted or rejected customs in use among other nations, or formed his institutions upon the basis of others already in existence before his day.

Would we not rather expect, from the entire tenor of his own teachings, to find that neither the laws nor the institutions of Moses were original with him? As his writings are for us the oldest

books the world possesses, they are *to us* original records of the antiquities, both of the church and of the human race. But the church of God had already been in existence for twenty-five hundred years before the Exodus from Egypt; and during all that time had Divine teachings, Divine ordinances, and officers appointed by Divine authority. Granted, that manifold corruptions had been introduced among men; so that true religion was the prevailing faith in no single nation, except among this chosen race; and that even among the children of Israel it had sadly declined. Still, corruption is often the perversion of institutions originally good; and we ought not to think it strange to find some similarity between the customs of various nations and those recognized in the laws of Moses. We know that sacrifices were made in the family of Adam; therefore we are not surprised to see the burning altar and the sprinkled blood in all the earth. So other principles and other services might be retained among heathen nations from the original law; and the similarity between these and the injunctions of Moses would not prove him a copyist. Since true religion preceded all corruptions, and his office was to restore the true, he would of course enjoin all the principles of piety that belonged to the ancient church of God, and he would adopt all such institutions of the former worship as still suited the service of God.

We have no express information concerning the

organization and ordinances of the church before the days of Moses. But we have many incidental references to existing institutions, even when it did not fall in with the design of the historian to give us full information. In reference to the priesthood in the church of God, we have no account, before the consecration of Aaron, of any such service in setting men apart to this ministry. But we know that sacrifices were offered from the days of Adam onward; we know that Melchizedek is abruptly introduced in the history as a recognized priest; we know that tithes were in his day an institution recognized for the support of the priesthood; and we even read of priests among the Israelites who came near before the Lord, Ex. xix. 22, *before* the law was given on Sinai. It is not possible to declare how many Mosaic institutions were a mere republication of institutions long previously maintained in the church of God.

It invalidates in no degree the inspired authority of Moses, if it even appears that his teachings are like others previously existing in the world; if he used the experience previously acquired, if he used previously written documents, or received suggestions from any quarter. For in all the inspired teachers of the church we find evidence that the Holy Spirit uses the natural faculties of men, and their acquired stores of wisdom and learning, and the peculiarities of their natural dispositions; so that each man, though moved by the Holy Ghost,

follows his own mode of thought, employs his own mind, uses his own style of composition, and writes conformably to his own character. The Spirit guided into all truth, and preserved from every error; but his influences did not prevent the due use of every human faculty. If Moses gives proof of a Divine commission, this carries every thing else with it. It is not for us to explain *how* the Spirit of God ever influences the mind of man, either for inspiration to communicate truth, or for illumination to understand it, or for judgment to discern truth from error in things before known; as we know not how he works to regenerate or sanctify the soul of man. But we may recognize that the wisdom of Moses and Paul and their stores of knowledge gathered from every quarter, do not interfere with the teachings of the Spirit. The institutions of Moses, imposed upon Israel in the desert, were laid upon the people by Divine authority.

Taking all these laws together, they are highly interesting. Not only do they give us the most ancient laws now extant, but they are the only entire code of a remote antiquity.* Many names of ancient lawgivers have attained reputation in modern times; but to say nothing of the fact that Solon and Lycurgus and Romulus and Numa and Confucius all are of far later date than Moses, we have but fragmentary parts of their teachings,

* Michaelis, *Laws, &c.*, Vol. I. p. 2.

while the entire laws of Moses have been carefully preserved. Within these laws also is embodied a fulness of meaning that shadows forth the great system of human salvation. And when the Apostle Paul tells us that these institutions were not designed to be permanent, but were to last only until the Seed they promised should come, (see Gal. iii.,) we have in the typical and prophetical elements of the Mosaic laws, a further proof of their Divine authority.

Plutarch informs us that when Solon was asked whether he had provided the best of laws for the Athenians, he answered, "The best they were capable of receiving."* Our Lord Jesus expressly recognizes that the laws of Moses respecting divorce were not intrinsically the best, being a decline from the original law of Eden, "because of the hardness of their hearts." Mark x. 5. This is the same as to say that Moses adapted his legislation to the character and necessities of the people. And if we consider that the Israelites had just come forth from a long bondage, we may readily agree that the liberty granted to the people was quite as far in advance as they were able to bear. We need not subscribe to the enthusiastic views of those who can find every principle of civil and religious liberty, as shown in modern constitutions, in the government of Israel; and yet it is

* Plutarch, i. 180, Harpers' Edition. See Wines' Com. on the Hebrew Laws.

but just to say that the rights of a citizen to a wise, impartial, righteous administration of the laws of the land were cared for among the Jews as nowhere else in the ancient world. The meanest citizen had free access to their legal tribunals; every crime, every civil dispute had its fair trial; and the voice of the people was heard in the choice of their rulers, as we do not find these things in lands that claimed a greater advance in civilization. We do not need to detract our just meed of praise from the principles of wise and righteous jurisprudence that have been gathered for us from the ancient pagan governments; but no people of antiquity possessed so mild and beneficial a government as that possessed by the Jews. It is a sufficient proof of this, that the Mosaic laws lasted for nearly fifteen hundred years; a permanency that belonged nowhere else. And to the laws of Moses our modern systems of jurisprudence are more deeply indebted than to any other of the ancient lawgivers. We have in them a system of laws, at first given to a generation who must win their lands by the sword, and yet adapted to a peaceful and separated people; we find here no arbitrary authority put into the hands of man, but everything regulated by a written constitution which even the most self-willed kings never ventured to change. Doubtless the Jewish Constitution gave much instruction to other nations. During the early periods of Jewish history, perhaps, they

did little to influence other nations; but under the kings, and especially during the prosperous reigns of David and Solomon, many foreigners came into Judea, and the world became acquainted with these Divine laws. And the long and wide dispersion of the Jewish people after the Babylonish captivity; the custom of the ancient philosophers of acquiring knowledge by travelling and by personal inspection of foreign customs; the translation of the Old Testament into the Greek language; the authority gained by such Jews as Daniel, Nehemiah, and Mordecai; and the general reputation of the people for intelligence and industry, were all means of acquainting the world with the excellence of Jewish law. Its influence upon modern nations we will further consider hereafter.

CHAPTER III.

THE DECALOGUE.

“When the great Sovereign would his will express,
He gives a perfect rule: What can he less?” COWPER.

THE excellence of the Ten Commandments consists in this: that they express in a brief compass all the principles of moral law for human guidance. Not a single duty belongs to man that may not be included under some one of the precepts of this brief law; and the highest efforts of human philosophy cannot suggest a more accurate or comprehensive classification of the essential principles of law than we have here. This law has been differently divided—Josephus assigns five precepts to the first, and five to the second table; the Romanists and the Lutherans assign three to the first, and seven to the second; while the most of the fathers, including Origen, Athanasius, Ambrose, and Chrysostom, with most Protestants, put four in the first, and six in the second table. The difference is not important, so long as the precepts themselves remain the same; but as the Romish church divides into three, the precepts of which we

make four, and thus their division of the tables is really the same as our own, so, in their catechisms, they presume to omit that part of their first commandment which constitutes the whole of our second. In *some* Romish and in the Lutheran catechisms all that part of the Decalogue which forbids the use of images, is suppressed. So Protestants say that Romanists blot out our second commandment. It is in their Bibles, but not in their catechisms. WE *say* this is because it conflicts with their usages: THEY *say* they have merely shortened the first precept. To complete the number ten, they divide the tenth into two. Hence their numbering of the precepts does not coincide with ours. Our fourth is their third; our sixth their fifth.

The classification of duties under this law is simple and complete. The first division is into two parts; our duty to God which naturally and properly comes first; and our duty to man. In regard to God the law regulates four things. I. The sole proper OBJECT of worship, the only living and true God. II. The proper MEANS of worship, *negatively* not by images; implying *positively* that we must approach him in ordinances of his own appointment. III. The proper SPIRIT of worship, with due reverence for the name and ordinances of God. IV. The special TIME appropriate to Divine worship. It must be confessed that this exhausts the whole subject. It is eminently proper that God himself should be made the first and

chief topic of instruction in religion; and when we worship the true God alone, by his own means, with a proper spirit, and in acceptable time, nothing further can be needed for true worship. Such then is the first table of the Law.

In regard to man, the second table, I. Enjoins our duty in the several relations we sustain in social life; the first recognized relation being named as the representative of all others. Our filial duty stands here to remind us that all duties are reciprocal, and involve each other; and that we must maintain the honour and perform the duty belonging to every one—our superiors, our inferiors, or our equals. II. It forbids all injuries against the persons, the purity, the property and the reputations of others. Or, to classify these same precepts otherwise, they forbid all violence, impurity, fraud, and falsehood. III. Then, that the law may not be interpreted as applying merely to external conduct, the last precept enjoins a proper frame of spirit towards all men.

It is very obvious that this great law is a mere epitome of the duties required of man; though it is a perfect epitome. It embraces the entire range of our duties; it binds man to entire sincere, cheerful, and continual obedience; under any example, it forbids sin of the like kind, together with its causes, means, occasions, appearances, and incitements; and it enjoins every duty with the proper spirit, means, and promotion of it; that

every duty and every promise are to be understood as implying the opposite sin as forbidden, and the opposite threatening as declared; and that we are equally required to do our own duty, and to promote like obedience in others; as well as to refrain from sins ourselves, and from being in anywise partakers of the sins of others.

This law of God is the only explicit summary of law to be found in all the Divine teachings. We may find all its principles recognized in the history of man before its delivery on Sinai; but we do not find any of its principles altered or abrogated by any of the succeeding prophets. Even our Lord Jesus Christ suggests no change in the Moral Law of Sinai. The reason of this is found in the infallible and inflexible excellency of the law itself. It was given by God himself; and as his own infinite wisdom, goodness, truth, and justice, required that these principles of law should be holy, wise, and good, so we can easily see that they were entirely incapable of alteration. What infinite wisdom has already made as good as possible, cannot be altered for the better; and it is undesirable for man and impossible in the righteousness of God, that it should be altered for the worse. From the very excellency of the law, its unchangeable character is desirable and necessary and certain.

Because this holy law requires perfect and perpetual obedience, and denounces the Divine curse

upon every transgressor, men fear the law and complain of its strictness. But we ought to make an important distinction between the excellency of the law, and the weakness and prejudices which arise from our sins. It is no uncommon thing for those who have broken any law to complain of the severity of their punishment; but it is a far easier thing to find fault with the Divine law, than to point out any instance in which it fails of infinite wisdom and righteousness. And because we are ever prone to be partial to ourselves in judging of the law that condemns us, perhaps the simplest test of the infinite excellence of the moral law may be found in considering its excellency as a safeguard throwing its protection around us, rather than as a law extending its authority over us. This law binds every other creature around you; it binds every man around you to love God and to love you. It is a shield of protection thrown around your best interests, and if fully kept by every man, you could suffer no injury, even in the thoughts of others. As true piety is the foundation and safeguard of every minor virtue, so the man who fully loves and honours God, according to the precepts of the first table of this law, is one prepared to love and respect his fellow-men.

But look through the precepts of the second table; see how carefully this Divine law commands every man to pay you all due respect and honour; how fully it forbids all violence, all impurity, all

fraud, all falsehood; and how entirely it demands that the heart, as well as the words and thoughts, should be right. In what particular, or in what degree, does any sane man wish this law changed in its demands upon his fellow-men? If your neighbour is so depraved that he cannot resist the propensity to steal your property, or to defame your character; if he has “eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin;” 2 Pet. ii. 14; if he hates you as Joseph’s brethren “hated him and could not speak peaceably to him;” Gen. xxxvii. 4; how much ought the law of God to be relaxed in its obligations, in order that incorrigible sinners may hate and wrong and injure you, and yet be guilty of no crime? Is it not right that if a man entertains toward you any causeless hatred, envy, revenge: exercises towards you dishonesty, violence, or falsehood: acts, speaks, or thinks evil of any kind, he should be held guilty to the exact extent of the injury thus done to you? Just this then, is the unchanging excellence of God’s law of Sinai; and what it demands of others towards you, it demands of you towards others.

So far as the principles of this law are concerned, there can be neither change nor relaxation. Yet in the application of these principles to the government of men, there are many degrees of guilt in the violation of the same law. Those who best know the requirements of God are the most guilty, when they break his commands: but no violation

of the law can be otherwise than guilty. So Paul regards himself as a sinner against God, when he persecuted the Christian church; and he speaks of it as an extenuation but not a justification of his conduct, that he “did it ignorantly in unbelief.” 1 Tim. i. 13. The law of God demands perfect righteousness; it can demand no less; where this is not, there it condemns and pronounces its curse. But this curse righteously falls with greater severity upon men whose iniquities are variously aggravated.

There is no more interesting inquiry to which our thoughts can turn than when we ask, What are the relations of the law of God and the gospel of Christ? We cannot now proceed to reply to this at large. We may suggest but these thoughts. There is no conflict between them. The gospel recognizes the holy and just claims of the law; demands a true holiness in all who embrace it; and never bestows its grace upon any sinner without first leading him to see the excellency of the law, and making him a lover of it. In his unregenerate state Paul says, “The law wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.” But when his heart was renewed he declared, “I delight in the law of the Lord after the inward man.”

The truth is, the law and the gospel are both best understood together. They are by no means the same. But the gospel is destroyed in all the richness of its grace, if the law is not maintained

in all its unchangeable righteousness of principle, and precept, and penalty. The gospel is a system of saving grace upon a foundation of entire righteousness. The Son of God came to die in our stead, because the law was so holy and just, that its claims must be met, and could not be set aside. We cannot honour Christ and his grace, unless we vindicate the entire justice of the law. When he bowed himself to obey the law, and to suffer its curse, he not only acknowledged its entire righteousness, but he showed that by no other means could salvation be secured for the sinful sons of men. Every believer in Christ therefore must own the excellency of the moral law; must obey it as the rule of his duty; must delight in its holiness; and yet must depend for his acceptance before God, solely upon the grace of Christ. Thus he receives both the law and the gospel: he sees in them neither inconsistency nor unrighteousness; but in the one he glorifies the unspotted holiness and justice, in the other the glorious goodness and mercy of God.

CHAPTER IV.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE MOSAIC LAWS.

WHAT is, and what ought to be, the influence exerted upon our civil institutions by the principles of ancient Jewish law? is an inquiry of much interest to us. In this land of freedom, ought we to throw off the restraints that Moses would lay upon us; or would we be a happier and a better governed people, if we respected more fully, the great principles of Scriptural jurisprudence? In giving our brief attention to the thoughts these inquiries suggest, it may be proper for us not to speak alone of Moses. When we speak of Roman law, our thoughts do not dwell solely upon Romulus, or Numa; but we revere also the later names of Ulpian, and Justinian. And while it is true that the code of Moses survived every revolution among the Jewish people for fifteen centuries, it is but just for us to consider him as but the first writer among his people; to remember that the entire Bible was written by Jewish pens; to recognize, in the later writers, no principles, less righteous or feebler, than his; and to take then the entire Bible

into our present thoughts rather than simply the first writer of it.

Every intelligent man will acknowledge that it is an exceedingly difficult task, in our age and land, wisely to present the true and just relations of civil and religious truths. The instincts of a free people against any encroachments of spiritual authority upon the domain of civil rights, are in morbid rather than healthful exercise among us. The light is pleasant to a healthy eye; but an inflamed eye may be tormented even by the light. There is an amount of prejudice upon this subject, that is indeed easily accounted for; but that is dangerous to the prevalence of righteous and invaluable principles: and that should therefore be carefully removed. It is an easy thing among us to excite prejudice against valuable principles and institutions, by raising the cry of *Church and State*; and the voice of truth may be drowned out in the turmoil; so that what truth really claims may be unknown to the mass of men; and they may trample down the safeguards of their own purity and freedom in pursuing that which among us is but a phantom.

In the United States, the conviction that the church and state should not be united; that the spiritual and temporal government of men should be kept distinct from each other, may be said to be the universal sentiment. And in England and Scotland where the government sustains an estab-

lished church, large, and we may believe, growing communities exist, who support their churches by the voluntary attendance and contributions of their people. And a London paper is quoted among us as declaring several years ago what seems even more evident since that time. "Here in England, we used to have an established church; and we have it still in name; but every year's legislation is tending to Americanize the English religion." Now we are not prepared to acknowledge that the Jewish commonwealth and the Jewish church, ever were united, in the same way and to the same extent, with the union that has been witnessed in later times; or if they were, that this gives us an authoritative, or desirable model for a Christian commonwealth. We are ready to deny, upon principle, that the church and the state should be united; and the world is ready to refuse any further consent that such unions shall take place, through the influence of long and bitter experience. The spiritual religion of the Bible cannot be enforced by the sanctions of human law; the ministers of this religion are only trammeled by the dignities of civil authority; corruptions of manners and morals, and the decline of spirituality to formalism and hypocrisy, ever attend the attempt to make church membership or Christian doctrines a qualification for civil duties, or civil offices; and dark and bitter ages of oppression have shown that man cannot be trusted with authority over the consciences of his

fellows. It seems amazing to us, in the long retrospect, that men could do such things, or that the prostrate nations could bear such things, as have been done through this accursed alliance. No greater crimes have ever been committed upon earth, against liberty and truth, against humanity and religion, against man and God, than were committed by the church of Rome, when for ages of cruelty and oppression, she claimed power over princes, and scourged them and their people in the name of conscience and the cross. It is not to be wondered at, that the tyranny of ecclesiastical rule has made men jealous of the influence which religion and the church of God exert upon civil society and civil government. This jealousy we respect, as important to maintain our civil and religious liberty. But just because civil and religious liberty stand or fall together; just because history informs us that the church became a despotism within herself, before she exercised despotic power upon those around her; just because therefore this tyranny was no legitimate result of Scriptural principles, but itself the result of decline and apostasy in the church; we would have this wholesome jealousy exerted, not to the injury of true religion, for this can be no benefit to man; but for the accurate discerning of the just line that should separate man's civil from his religious interests. To discern how the church and the state should stand apart, and where their mutual influences

should be recognized, is a matter of no small importance.

Civil government has its true foundation in Divine appointment. The proof of this springs not only from the Scriptures: it may be argued from the social constitution of man. If a body of men were casually thrown together upon a barren island, where no government existed and no laws were promulgated, they must needs have some recognized principles of social order, from which a government must spring; and that rule must itself be shaped by the principles to which it owes its origin. A government founded on right should itself maintain right. Men may be of diverse judgments, touching what is right and wrong, or touching the true method of deciding such questions; but there are things which the authority of no earthly government can make of binding force upon the consciences of its subjects. If human laws allow infanticide, it remains still a monstrous crime. And a free people ever indulge the liberty of judging the laws that are extended over them; they dissent from many to which yet they are submissive; they esteem a blind submission to every law, simply because it stands upon the statute book, totally inconsistent with true freedom; and heavy and long-continued wrongs that threaten to grow worse, and cannot be rectified by better means, may rightfully be made to justify revolutions in a government. The lawgivers of the earth have authority for righteous

ends; thus they themselves are under authority; for God is the true Author of their commission. Scripture and right reason alike affirm that obedience is due, not for their own sake, but because they administer a needed rule upon principles of righteousness.

Yet we are not from this to draw the inference that the Bible should formally be received as the statute book of any earthly government. It is designed to hold no such place; and it is proof of Divine wisdom that its writers make no such claims. Its elevating and stimulating power is better otherwise exerted. Indirect rather than direct influences are here exerted by the sacred word. So it can operate among any people; in any state of society; under any form of government; and while aiming at the highest advantage to man, it never fails to awaken human energies to secure social progress. So while it is not a civil code for any nation, every people should derive much wisdom from it to guide their steps. If indeed these teachings are from God, we may expect them to throw light upon all the important duties of man. The principles of rectitude it teaches, no state can wisely or properly contravene or even ignore; certainly wide decline from them is ruinous; and that will be the most prosperous state whose laws are most consonant with the principles these sacred teachings approve. The kingdom of Christ is not of this world; there are separate spheres for the

church and the state; they may ever be jealous of mutual encroachments; but the time is well spent that carefully considers their just relations, and gives due honour to each.

There are sterling principles upon this subject, which it is not difficult for us to settle in abstract theory; yet in carrying even these out in their details, difficulties often arise which no mere theory can fully anticipate or solve. We may agree that the church should not derive pecuniary support from the state; that the civil ruler has no power over the conscientious convictions of citizens; and that civil penalties should never be inflicted for spiritual offences; and these are principles of invaluable excellence. The government that abides by these, can never become oppressive. But when we have acknowledged the foundation principles of true liberty, it is manifestly impossible entirely to separate the righteous functions belonging to civil and ecclesiastical authority. Grant that their spheres are different; their aims different; their influences different; and their penalties different. But they alike govern men; they are alike, in their wise administration, ruled by righteous principles; they take cognizance of the same actions oftentimes; and the man who comes up to the very highest standard of church membership can never be charged with unworthy citizenship. As the same man may be a citizen and a church member; as the same conduct may be a civil crime and an

ecclesiastical offence; so the laws of the church and the state must often have reference to the same things. And they ought always to be like parallel lines; along side of each other, but never crossing. And this would be so, but for the very important fact that the understanding and the administering of their respective principles and functions must ever belong to human minds. The state ought to protect every citizen in such an exercise of religious liberty as does not interfere with the well-being of society: the church ought to inculcate correct morality and sustain legitimate authority; and thus support the wholesome rule of the civil law. But man's ignorance and folly often prevent him from discerning just principles; and man's passions and wickedness often lead him to do contrary to right; and thus principles and interests which should not clash, may often come into collision. Nothing is more important than to point out that righteousness and freedom, in the church of God and out of it, run in parallel lines; and that true religion is the firmest support of a wise civil polity.

If we lay aside then the prejudices that have been awakened by long years of ecclesiastical misrule, we should acknowledge the reasonableness of expecting to receive from the church of God the most righteous principles of law, and the wisest principles of civil government; that this is rather promotive of liberty than subversive of it; and that

that is the most wholesome and desirable state of society where man recognizes the harmonious obligations which govern his relations towards man and God. Do the changes of day and night, as our earth revolves upon her own axis, prove any the less beneficent, because also the planet makes a longer revolution around the central sun? Or is it not the same sun that both changes our seasons, and gives our day? Neither man, whose race is immortal, nor nations, whose organized existence is but for a brief day of earthly life, can wisely depart from the law of the God, who made and rules them both. Our mortal and immortal—our civil and our spiritual existence, should be ruled by principles of righteousness; and that cannot be true and right and profitable in civil government, which is false and wrong and injurious in religion.

These Jewish writers profess to be, not merely human lawgivers, but prophets, whose principles are the dictation of Divine wisdom. Whatever then may be said of their precepts that were designed for local application, or temporary purposes, it should be granted that the principles underlying their legislation are principles of infinite wisdom and righteousness. Wherever the authority of these writers is acknowledged the influence of the Bible must follow of course. A Christian people cannot so remain, and yet reject the influence of these teachings. There remains indeed much room for inquiry as to the proper application of the prin-

ciples here stated; as to the alleged abrogation of particular things; as to the manner in which the details of a Christian government should be carried out. But the principles of the Bible, a Christian people cannot throw aside.

And if we look around us at the present advancement of our race, we must readily acknowledge that the civilized nations of Europe and America have made inestimable advances upon the jurisprudence of other lands and times; and that their chief superiority is to be traced to the influence of the principles received from these Jewish writers.* An immense stride backwards to bar-

* "An eminent lawyer once tempted me to step out of my chosen walk of study, and to read an essay which he selected for the occasion, on a purely legal question. The work selected for the experiment was by that eminent English jurist, Sir William Jones. It related to a single point of legal ethics, and was commended to my attention as one of the finest specimens extant of pure logic applied to questions of law. The work was 'Jones on Bailments.' Every legal gentleman will understand the intellectual delight with which a mind unaccustomed to such investigations, but otherwise not unfamiliar with discipline and culture, would rest and expatiate in the calm, self-evidencing conclusions of that beautiful monograph. Perhaps, however, the most striking fact that presses upon the mind of any unprofessional reader of that work is, that the great jurist seeks his highest illustrations of equity, not in Roman jurisprudence, not in Persian and Indian law, with which he was equally familiar, but in the laws of Moses—in the civil code of the Hebrew commonwealth, which, with all its intentionally stringent national peculiarities, had yet its foundations in the eternal principles of right. The majestic principles which underlie the entire structure of our own civil and political fabric, have been drawn from the same source. Back of the Declaration of Independence, back of Magna Charta, back of Coke and Blackstone, back of Justinian, back of the Twelve

barism must we make, if we should displace from our statute books, the things we have learned from Moses and the prophets. It does not surely derogate from the excellence of our civilization that "it has sprung forth from our religion." This indeed is true of every form of society upon earth. It is quite impossible but that the religion of a people should be the basis of their civil society; this has ever been true in all the world; an atheistic form of society is as impossible as it is undesirable; we stand in the front ranks of civilization, just because we possess the true religion.

Let any one attempt to remove from the fabric of civil society the essential institutions of social order that depend upon our Christianity, and he will learn that his success must be the ruin of the state. What becomes of the family, as it ordered in our laws, and as it honours and supports our society, if we strike from beneath it its support from the Bible as the word of God? The dark pages of profane history may declare how great have been the corruptions of society, by polygamy and divorce and the vices which attend the lawlessness of lust; for lack of the simple rule which Christian nations have derived from the Bible, and whose slightest

Tables, in that civil code which God, by the hand of Moses, gave to his ancient people, the jurist and the statesman find imbedded those great principles of law and equity which have commanded the assent of the wise in all ages, and have entered into the universal life of nations and commonwealths."—J. S. HART, L.L. D.

relaxation, in theory or in practice, opens up the way for the inroads of innumerable social evils. Marriage, and the family relation are divine ordinances, and can have their proper authority and influence in civil society only when they are so recognized.

And so is it with the ordinance of the oath. Under all governments it is necessary to provide the most effectual methods for impressing upon men their responsibilities in the discharge of certain duties. No wise laws can presume much upon the truthfulness, or faithfulness of men. If men have power in their hands, they are often tempted to abuse it; if their interests so prompt, they are tempted to unfaithfulness or falsehood. Human governments are utterly powerless to carry on their most important functions without calling in the aid of religion and of God. The most important part of every man is that hidden, invisible soul, whose thoughts, feelings and purposes, human judges cannot discern: and yet this soul must be influenced, or the bands of social life must be ruptured. Hence men use the oath of confirmation. When a man enters upon the duties of any office he takes a solemn oath that he will faithfully discharge these duties. When a man is lawfully called upon to aid in settling any question of rights or injuries, he takes a solemn oath to tell the truth as he knows it, or to do justice between man and man as he discerns it. The power to impose such oaths to secure

human truth and faithfulness, is essential to the well-being of society; and that such oaths should be respected by every conscience, is of the utmost importance. But what do these oaths mean! The forms of them may differ: human wickedness and folly may pervert them; but whatever meaning, and solemnity and force belong to the oath, flow from this single fact, that it is an appeal to Almighty God, as the searcher of hearts, to know and punish the unfaithfulness or the untruthfulness of him who has taken the oath, even in instances where human law can neither discover nor punish the crime. By using the oath, every civil government acknowledges its inability to govern men without the aid of religion; is obliged to call to its assistance the knowledge and power of God; and clearly confesses that the foundation of authority is the Divine will. The oath is of no propriety or force, except as men recognize the supremacy, the knowledge, and the justice of God.* How lamentable a state of society grows out of the prevalence of perjury! And how lamentable to consider that the careless, ignorant and irreverent methods of administering this solemn appeal to God by our civil officers, are themselves the cause of much corruption in society.†

It would not be hard to follow further the train of reflection thus suggested; and speak of the im-

* Blackstone, iv. 43.

† See, *The Oath a Divine Ordinance*, by D. X. Junkin.

mense influence which religion exerts upon our social and civil life. We cannot realize, with the utmost efforts of our imagination, how much the bands of society would be relaxed, if any people should throw off religious restraints, even under the most corrupt forms of religion. Take away man's belief in a Supreme Ruler, his ideas of accountability, and of a future life; let him judge that no mind is acquainted with his secret sins; that no avenger can reach his secret injuries; that his oaths are addressed merely to man, and that thus the wickedness of crime belongs only to its discovery; let him look upon the earth as his only home, and upon earthly things as his only concern; and this necessarily dissolves the strongest ties that bind him to his fellows. You might as well suppose that you could loosen the ties of gravitation that bind our earth to the sun and the universe; and yet maintain the earth's motions and order for herself alone. Man would no longer be governed by any thoughts of virtue or duty. These terms lose their chief value in the absence of a God; human laws would be little regarded; and selfishness and all the baser passions of man would rule such a society.

Now especially it is to be noted, that the virtue of the people is of far greater importance under a free government than elsewhere; and that it is a fatal error for a free people to undervalue the influence of religion. Instances can be found of prof-

ligate princes, as to personal character, who yet have ruled their subjects wisely. But a self-governing people must be a virtuous people. We need not now dwell upon the proof that civil liberty, in the modern acceptation of the term, is the offspring of Christianity; is not now enjoyed except where the Bible is free; and declines with the decline of religious freedom. But we may clearly claim that all the best principles of our civil liberty are the very principles that are peculiar to Christianity. It is through the influence of Christianity that men have learned the value of man as man, and without regard to the distinctions of land or race; that the kindly sympathies of our nature have been called forth towards one another; and that a due respect to the rights of others has been fostered; than which few things are more important for the maintenance of liberty. It might be possible to maintain the laws of this land, apart from the virtue of its citizens, if we would establish standing armies, and erect more numerous and stringent police courts; but a free people can never be a well governed people, unless they are virtuous. So long then as the Bible is our chief instructor in morals; so long as the belief of its Divine authority gives power to its wholesome injunctions, there ought to be no hesitation in our legislatures, in recognizing the place really held by these important teachings.*

* Channing's Works, v. 339.

There ought to be no “entangling alliances” between the church and the state; for they have ever proved injurious to both. But neither can they stand wholly apart, or ignore their mutual existence. Every wholesome civil government must be founded upon the principles of religious faith in the people. Once, and within the recent memory of man, such a monster as a state at war with religion has been seen upon the earth. The very being of God was denied; the Sabbath and even the week abrogated; revelation was rejected; and reason and liberty—their shadows, not the substance—deified. But no state ever had so short a life as France without a God; and yet no such brief period of human history is so crowded with the long and appalling records of misery and iniquity. Not only were the services of religion abandoned; but the influences of these immense innovations were ruinous to every social interest. The churches were closed and the theatres multiplied;* marriage was made binding only during the pleasure of the parties, and one half of the births in Paris were illegitimate; the revenues of charitable institutions were confiscated, and beggary frightfully abounded; in brief, the historian of that Reign of Terror closes his dark chapter upon those scenes with this sentence: “The history of the world has no parallel to the horrors of that

* In Paris alone during the Reign of Terror, the theatres increased from six to twenty-five. Christian Treasury, 1848, p: 60.

long night of suffering, because it has none of the guilt which preceded it; tyranny never assumed so hideous a form, because licentiousness never required so severe a punishment.”* No people could exist as a state through a single generation of such a rule without a recognized God. After an interval of seven years, Napoleon restored the Christian worship, with the general approbation of France. Yet the mischievous influences of this brief rule upon the state of morals among that people is still felt.

* Alison’s Europe, 1, 232.

CHAPTER V.

SCRIPTURAL LAWS AND THE RIGHTS OF CONSCIENCE.

“He is the freeman whom the truth makes free,
And all are slaves besides.”

WE now desire briefly to show that freedom of conscience may be consistently and fully maintained at the same time that the principles of true religion are recognized as lying at the foundation of civil society; that indeed thus only can the rights of conscience be acknowledged or respected; and that the uniform testimony of experienced jurists, and the pages of history, sustain these views.

It is worthy of notice, at the outset, that the full idea of a conscience in any man, and its active and normal efficiency in governing him as a moral being, must involve the necessity of recognizing the being and authority of God. A man may be indeed an Atheist, and as an Atheist he may have a sense of right and wrong; because it is impossible for any speculative or practical error to destroy the natural constitution of the human mind. But

an Atheist's sense of right and wrong cannot extend to religious obligations; and therefore in regard to them he cannot have either that moral perception or that sense of responsibility, which are needful before a man can plead conscientious scruples in bar of obedience. For, if we speak in entire consistency, we may affirm that upon irreligious principles, men can never plead conscientious scruples against the obligation to recognize the laws of the land. Men of the most diverse opinions may oppose laws as inexpedient, as oppressive, as distasteful, as destructive of civil liberty, and even as opposed to the moral sense of mankind. But even this last ground is not quite the same as opposing for conscience' sake. If I oppose a law for conscience' sake; if I resist because I dare not obey, this very attitude recognizes on my part the Divine Being and the Divine authority. No man can plead his conscientious scruples against any requirements of human laws, without standing forth, not only as a moral, but also as an accountable being. Why dare I not? Because a power superior to myself—superior also to the human laws, forbids me. And thus it comes to pass that a government recognizing religion and founded upon the great principles of religion, is the only government that can occupy the proper ground in regard to the rights of the human conscience. For, on the one hand, any man who throws off the restraints of religion can never consistently plead the

rights of conscience; and, upon the other hand, an irreligious government cannot recognize or protect such rights. Happily for the best interests of men, these things are indissolubly connected. If we wish our religious rights protected, they must be recognized; and only the government that stands itself upon principles of truth and righteousness can be administered upon wise and righteous principles.

It is a cardinal principle among us, that the rights of conscience are to be respected; yet this necessarily implies that the government itself be administered upon righteous principles, and that therefore there may be some conflict between the excellence of just law and the crude ideas that some men entertain of religious duty. So the Constitution of the State of New York declares that, "the free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination or preference, shall for ever be allowed in this state to all mankind; but the liberty of conscience hereby secured shall not be so construed as to excuse acts of licentiousness, or justify practices inconsistent with the peace or safety of this state." Art. 7, § 3. This limitation is absolutely necessary; without it, liberty becomes lawlessness; and the well-being of society is destroyed to meet the mere opinions of individuals. Indeed, the caprice of any man may set aside the laws. It is plain to every intelligent man, that a wise state must protect its own best

interests, even at the cost of occasional apparent conflict with the rights of conscience.

It would be an easy thing to multiply citations from men learned in the laws of this Christian land, to prove the indissoluble connection that exists between civil liberty, and the recognition and support of religion. It has indeed been said that ours is not a Christian government; and that we do nothing, as a people, to promote religion. It is true, we do not use the pecuniary resources of this government to sustain the church; we hold out no inducements to lead our citizens to unite with the church; we disfranchise no man for his opinions in matters of religion. But this is a Christian government. The treaty of peace which acknowledged our independence, begins "In the name of the blessed Trinity!" Our government recognizes the Christian Sabbath as a day of rest; it acknowledges the God of the Scriptures in every oath of office; our State laws forbid blasphemy; and the code of morals recognized upon our statute books, is drawn from the Christian Bible. And this government is bound, out of regard to its own well-being, at once to respect the rights of conscience and to uphold the righteous principles of true religion.

Judge Story, in his Commentaries upon the Constitution of the United States, says, "The right of society or government to interfere in matters of religion, will hardly be contested by any persons

who believe that piety, religion, and morality, are intimately connected with the well-being of the state, and indispensable to the administration of civil justice. The promulgation of the great doctrines of religion can never be a matter of indifference to any well ordered community. It is indeed difficult to conceive how any civilized society can well exist without them." So again, "At the time of the adoption of the Constitution the general, if not the universal, sentiment in America, was, that Christianity ought to receive encouragement from the state, so far as such encouragement was not incompatible with the private rights of conscience, and the freedom of religious worship. An attempt to level all religions, and to make it a matter of state policy to hold all in utter indifference, would have created universal disapprobation, if not universal indignation."*

So Chancellor Kent declares that the Constitution of the State of New York, "never meant to withdraw religion in general, and with it the best sanctions of moral and social obligations, from all consideration and notice of the law." So when Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, he used this language, "No government among any of the polished nations of antiquity, and none of the institutions of modern Europe, (a single and monitory case excepted,) ever hazarded such a bold experiment upon the solidity of the public morals, as to

* Story's Expositions, Abridged, §§ 442, 444.

permit, with impunity and under the sanction of their tribunals, the general religion of the community to be openly insulted and defamed. The very idea of jurisprudence with the ancient lawgivers and philosophers, embraced the religion of the country.” So he argues it can be no less with us, for “we are a Christian people, and the morality of the country is deeply engrafted upon Christianity.”

So Chief Justice Duncan, of Pennsylvania, says, “Christianity, general Christianity, is, and always has been, a part of the common law of Pennsylvania.”

So the late Chief Justice of the same state,* in vindicating the authority of the civil law in upholding the Christian Sabbath, declares that the founders of our Constitution, in enacting righteous laws, never meant, on the one hand, to enslave the human conscience, nor, on the other, to build up a system of justice upon any other than a Christian basis. They knew that our civilization sprang from the Bible, and they legislated accordingly. So he argues thus:

“They never thought of tolerating Paganism on the ground of liberty of conscience. They could not admit this as a civil justification of human sacrifices, or parricide, or infanticide, or Thuggism, or of such modes of worship as the disgusting and corrupting rites of the Dionysia, and

* Commonwealth vs. Nesbit, 10 Casey's Reports, 403-411.

Aphrodisia, and Eleusinia, and other festivals of Greece and Rome.

“They did not mean that the pure moral customs which Christianity has introduced should be without legal protection, because some Pagan or other religionist, or anti-religionist, should advocate, as a matter of conscience, concubinage, polygamy, incest, free love and free divorce, or any of them.

“They did not mean that phallic processions, and satyric dances, and obscene songs, and indecent statues and paintings of ancient or of modern Paganism, might be introduced, under the profession of religion, or pleasure, or conscience, to seduce the young and the ignorant into a Corinthian degradation; to offend the moral sentiment of a refined, Christian people; and to compel Christian modesty to associate with the nudity and impurity of Polynesian or of Spartan women. No Christian people could possibly allow such things. No written law, founded on such bald and impotent rationalism, could present the slightest obstacle to the sentiment and action of a people in opposition to such things.

“Every Christian man is sure that it is his religion that has suppressed the Pagan customs just alluded to; that to it is due the large advance in justice, benevolence, truth, and purity, that belongs to modern civilization; that it has purified and elevated the family relations; that it has so elevated the moral standards of society that the indecencies

and cruelties and cheats of Paganism are now condemned by custom and by law as crimes. And he is very sure that the Sabbath and its institutions were the prominent means of this progress, and are essential to its maintenance and continuance. How then is it possible for a Christian people to avoid protecting such a day and its institutions?"

Surely it is proper for us more distinctly to recognize that the church and the state are not forces antagonistic to each other. While it is wise for us to remember that any power, civil or spiritual, being committed to human hands, must be carefully guarded against perversion; while we should never forget the lessons of human experience, so impressive in regard to the exercise of temporal power to punish spiritual offences, let us yet recognize that the firmest basis of true morality is in the law of God; that our wisest principles of equity and jurisprudence come to us from the Bible; and that we have no valuable exchanges to make, in truth or law, with any Pagan people. It is not possible for us fully to understand the corruption of the Hebrew people after their long bondage in Egypt, when Moses gave them these laws in the wilderness of Sinai. But we know that so pure a code of morals was far in advance of them; and we see many evidences that they were much addicted to the idolatries of Egypt, and to the abominable rites that usually accompanied them. And it is just as impossible for us, in this Christian land, to realize

how much we are indebted to the elevating influences of Christianity for the high stand we occupy among the nations of men.

Thirty-three centuries ago the great lawgiver of the Jews gave to the Hebrew people, in the wilderness of Sinai, the first written constitution that any nation ever possessed, and a code of laws the most excellent that antiquity has preserved for us. That favoured people did not keep their own institutions pure and undefiled; but no intelligent mind can question that the era of their highest prosperity was just when their entire system of written law was most faithfully carried into execution. And when, fifteen centuries later than Sinai, a new impulse was given to the civilization of the world, it sprang forth from the same people. Christianity did indeed lay aside what a superficial observer would call Judaism; yet as the ripening grain lays off the blossoming and chaff which were but designed to nourish and sustain the growing fruit; for it has borne down to our times the same substantial principles of jurisprudence then given in the desert at the foot of that glorious mountain. And in the world as we see it, it is easy to judge where freedom is best known in principle and practice; where is the largest intelligence among the people; where are the noblest sentiments expressed for the welfare of the race; and where may be found the most active and enterprising commerce that knows and binds together the various families

of man. Where the Bible is published in the largest editions, is freely circulated and is well read, there are the people both intelligent and free; and the chosen men of such lands, men against whose integrity and intelligence no charges can be justly laid, are men who know and love and reverence the teachings of Moses and the prophets.

It becomes every man in Christian and Protestant communities to acknowledge that the Sacred Scriptures and the principles we derive from them lie at the foundation of a nation's prosperity. No people can long be free unless they are well taught and virtuous; and all theoretical and practical neglects of these great teachings surely avenge themselves. Nor need there be any fear of one-sided and careless government when these principles bear largest sway. Christianity is liberal and large-hearted; it is neither bigoted nor sectarian; nor is the Bible the book of any sect or party. A great people may be one upon its principles; and while it would make ours a Christian and Protestant people, it would bid us maintain alike and consistently, that all men are free to worship God, without dictation from human authority; yet that our institutions are superior to all others, because they are based upon the teachings of a true religion, whose chief principles we must ever sustain. "Happy is that people that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord." Psalm cxliv. 15.

CHAPTER VI.

SCENES AT SINAI.

WE are unable to decide whether all the commandments of God to Israel would have been spoken to them directly from Mount Sinai, if the people themselves had not said that they were unable to hear the Divine voice. Ex. xx. 19. But after the delivery of the Decalogue, Moses drew near to God, and received these statutes for the people. In the discharge of this duty he ascended the Mount several times. In Exodus xxiv. we have the record of a solemn transaction, to which, it may be, reference is had in Heb. ix. 19. Not only Moses, but with him Aaron and his two sons, doubtless already designated for the priesthood, with seventy of the elders of Israel, went up before God. These *elders* doubtless had this office even in Egypt; and they, and those now with them, were representatives of the whole congregation. But before this representative company ascended the mountain, the great lawgiver read the commandments of the Lord in the ears of the people; and they all answered with one voice, "All the

words which the Lord hath said, we will do." Then he built an altar, and set up twelve pillars, as tokens that God and the twelve tribes of Israel now entered into a solemn covenant. The ceremonies used at this time are more fully described in the Epistle to the Hebrews; and from them the general law is declared, that the remission of sins is always connected with the shedding of blood. It was not purely a covenant of obedience, which the Lord now made with Israel; the grace of the gospel must be recognized in all his dealings. We are told that Moses not only took the blood in the basins, but also water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled the book of the covenant and the people; thus signifying that the covenant made was one sealed with blood. This done, Moses, and Aaron, and his two sons, and the company of seventy elders, as the representatives of the entire body of the people, went up into the mount, and were permitted to hold an interview with God.

Two remarks may be made upon this sight of the God of Israel as now granted to the elders.

First. There is an obscurity, perhaps designed, about the description of the God of Israel. Some glorious manifestation was visible to them; and yet such as allowed Moses afterwards to say, "Ye saw no manner of similitude." Deut. iv. 15. The clear shining place of HIS majestic throne, and it may be, some glorious, but changing forms, which could not be represented, and therefore could never

be imitated for the purposes of idol worship, were seen by the elders. When God condescended to appear to them, he yet guarded against the subsequent abuse of this favour, to the subverting of the law which he had given.

Second. Whatever manifestation was made of God, was in the person of the Son. All the appearances of divinity in the Old Testament are to be so understood. When Isaiah in the temple saw Jehovah upon his throne, the vision is explained by an Evangelist; that he saw the glory of CHRIST and spake of HIM. Compare Isa. vi. 1, and John xii. 41. So it is true that no man hath ever seen God, the Father; but the Son, a Divine Person, has ever been the Revealer of the God-head. John i. 18.

“Upon the nobles of Israel he laid not his hand.” Not long afterwards God assured Moses, “Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me and live.” Ex. xxxiii. 20. But here the nobles of Israel safely saw him. Yet this all implies that they saw not the full display of the Divine glory; it was great condescension that they saw him at all. But not only did they see him. They did eat and drink before him. This we may regard as a sacrificial meal. They ate of the sacrifices, that had just before been offered, to signify not only the ratification of the covenant, but also the reconciliation of the parties. We may make a wide distinction between the *offering* of the sacri-

fice, and the *partaking* of the sacrifice. The offering of the sacrifice is to find acceptance; the eating of the sacrifice is the proof of acceptance. Not enemies, but friends, sit at a common table, and partake of the same food. Not enemies, but friends, are made guests in the house of their entertainer. Nor does God in his word give us a more frequent signification of friendship and communion than by means of a feast with him. So we may say that the Lord's Supper is not a sacrifice, as if by it enemies were to be reconciled to God; it is a partaking of the benefits of a sacrifice already offered; therefore for friends and in ratification of the covenant.

After this, Aaron and his sons and the elders returned to the camp; and Moses and Joshua were called to approach still nearer to God in the mount. After six days spent together, perhaps in exercises of devotion, Moses was called up into the midst of the cloud on the summit of Sinai. Nothing further is said of Joshua until at the end of forty days; when it appears that he had remained all that time in the mount. The design of associating Joshua with Moses doubtless was to put a special honour upon him in the eyes of all Israel, as the successor of Moses and their future leader. But we do not know what were the engagements of Joshua during this long period. We can hardly judge that he was with Moses all the time, since no mention is made of him; but his forty days of waiting upon Sinai

may have been preparatory to the future duties of Joshua; as our Lord, of whom, in name and office, Joshua was a type, passed forty days of temptation in the wilderness before he began his public ministry.

But we will not now give our attention to the communications made to Moses during this season spent in the mount. Let us rather turn our steps to the camp of Israel; and see the movements of the busy congregation. When their elders returned to the camp, the government was placed temporarily in the hands of Aaron and Hur. Doubtless for a little while matters went on smoothly. The solemn scenes which the people had recently witnessed made a serious impression upon them; and the sight of the mountain still surrounded with the dark clouds, declaring Jehovah's presence, filled them with awe. But when Moses had now been gone from them for an entire month, and rumours perhaps began to circulate that he was lost, the people became impatient at their stay at the foot of Sinai, and the first impulse of which we read is towards idolatry. They urged Aaron to make gods for them, for Moses was lost.

We are much at a loss to explain the conduct of Aaron upon this occasion. If Moses was indeed lost, why should not his brother indulge in grief, rather than appoint a festive occasion; or go to seek him in the mountain, rather than overturn the ordinances he had so lately established? And

what connection really was there between the disappearance of Moses, and the propensity of Israel's apostatizing from their God? Some suppose that Aaron made answer as he did, not because he wished to favour their idolatry, but because he lacked principle and boldness to give a decided refusal and to withstand their demands. He supposed they would be unwilling to surrender all their golden ornaments for the purpose of making the image of their god: and that thus he could defeat their purpose, while apparently willing to comply with it. But if this was his motive in making such a demand, then it happened to Aaron, as it almost always happens to those who are not bold enough to make an open and decided opposition to evil. He was ensnared by his own cunning folly. The very proposal to take their ornaments was a snare to himself. It was impliedly a promise that then he would make an idol; though this was not his original intention. In several respects it put him upon slippery ground. After making such a proposal, he could no longer argue that the thing they asked was in itself criminal and wicked; for his own words had put it upon a different ground. An inconsistent man, in moral and religious things, is always weak. Had Aaron stood boldly up to his duty, and reproved the iniquity of the people; had he reminded them of the solemn prohibition to make, or to bow down before any graven image, his position would have been incomparably stronger.

But perhaps he was not now disposed to resist them.

It is an important lesson for all times and ages, that it is unwise to tamper with evil by feigned compliances, while we cherish the hope of evading its demands. If we do not always wish to give a rough reply to those who tempt us to evil, yet there is every advantage in a decided reply. It is natural to judge that an equivocal refusal opens the door for renewed solicitation; and that partial or equivocal compliances do but multiply a man's temptations. If a man is never known to taste the intoxicating cup, his companions do not expect it of him; and either do not ask, or at least do not urge him to it. But if a man occasionally indulges in its use, then the social habits of his companions require that he should be asked; his declining does not prevent further solicitation; and the fear of giving offence to one set of friends, by refusing what he has yielded to another, places him in double danger. We give the chief power over us to our temptations by our own unwillingness to stand firm against evil as evil. We make excuses, where we should decidedly and firmly decline; we seek to vindicate a policy, where rather we should urge a principle; and even when we escape an actual fall into evil, we lose the moral power of our refusal by the apologetic manner of it. If Aaron wished to resist the people, he was ensnared by his own proposal.

Perhaps this sin in him, who was the high priest of Israel, like the repentance and restoration of Peter so long afterwards, may teach us this double lesson. *First*, That God has no earthly servants without sin. Even the high priest of the Jewish people when he made atonement must offer “first for his own sins and then for the people’s.” Heb. vii. 27. The Son of God, our great Mediator, alone was spotless. But, *Secondly*, The sin of God’s servants neither prevents their own acceptable approach to him, nor their acceptable service on behalf of others. Aaron could be a priest, though he had joined the people in their idolatry; and Peter could be an apostle, though he had denied his Master. For they, and all true worshippers, come to God in the name of the spotless Son of God; and the ordinances of God’s worship are effectual means of salvation not from any virtue in themselves or in the servants administering them; but by the direct blessing of God and the working of the Holy Spirit in the believing worshipper.

Nor should we omit this remark on the fall of Aaron into this sin, that the church of God has witnessed in every age the reproachful fall of those of whom better things have been expected; and that the restoration of such to the Divine favour presents to man the most remarkable features of the gospel. There can be no doubt that much reproach has been thrown upon religion by these falls of good men; that many harden their hearts in

evil because of them, and go further and further from God and truth. But there is as little reason to question that we have lessons of the highest importance in these cases, and especially in his restoring grace to the backslidden. The evil of sin everywhere, and its unchanged nature, indeed its peculiar enormity, in even believing hearts; the depth of our depravity, and our need of constant watchfulness and prayer, on the one hand; the forbearance and freeness and largeness of the mercy of God, on the other, are clearly shown. Above all, here appears the great fact that God forgives the chief of sinners; he has written it in many examples, of every class of offenders; and if some wrest his mercies to their own destruction, yet every penitent rejoices to find examples specially encouraging to him, somewhere among the Aarons, or Davids, or Manassehs, or Magdalens, or Peters, or Pauls, or Augustines, or Bunyans of the church.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GOLDEN CALF.

As the Egyptians were accustomed to worship a calf or bullock, under the name of their god Apis, there seems little reason to doubt that the Israelites designed to imitate the worship they had familiarly seen in the land of bondage, when they urged Aaron to make a god of this shape. Indeed, through all their wickedness in the desert, the people show how mischievous was the influence of their early training in the midst of idolatry; and it is instructive to reflect that Canaan was finally inherited by a younger generation, chiefly born and trained in their separation from the defiling world. It was but adopting the usual deceit of idolaters, for them to give this idol the name of the true God. They did not propose apostasy; they simply desired a visible representation of the God that had delivered them from Egypt. So the proclamation was made, “to-morrow is a feast to Jehovah.” But this apology for image-worship the Scriptures do not accept as valid. It may very well be doubted whether any thoughtful Pa-

gan ever worshipped the mere image before which he bowed.* A Roman philosopher could have bowed to a statue of Jupiter upon the Capitoline Hill, and to another statue of the same god upon Mars' Hill in Athens; and yet never dream that in so doing he worshipped two Jupiters. The very multiplying of similar images called by the same name, shows that idol worship is always *representative*; and it is no more a just apology in a Romish cathedral, than it was at the foot of Sinai, that the image is not the object of worship. God had forbidden all religious worship to any other than himself; and all use of images in his worship. So this service is expressly called the idolatry of the people.

We are not told what was the size of the image as Aaron made it. As the word *calf* is sometimes used for a bullock of three years old, and as Apis was selected by certain rules when he was a calf, and worshipped as long he lived, unless he over-lived twenty-five years, even to suppose the image life-size would leave it really indefinite. No difficulty therefore has ever been suggested from the want of sufficient gold in the camp to make the image. But evidently the people had come forth from Egypt skilled in the various sciences of that civilized land. It may be that Bezaleel, the grandson of Hur, whose skill was afterwards employed

* See Neander's Church History, i. 21, 27, for quotations from Plutarch and Porphyry respecting the worship of images.

in fashioning the tabernacle for God's service, was the chief artist in planning and finishing the golden calf. This would be no more surprising, in a moral point of view, than to see the whole done under the direction of Aaron, the high priest at Jehovah's altar.

It is a matter of interesting inquiry to know how this idol was made. It is generally understood that the image was molten, or cast; that therefore it was perhaps a solid image of gold. Commentators seem almost unanimously of this opinion; yet it will be the object of a few paragraphs to suggest quite a different interpretation. This was adopted by the writer of these pages several years before he read the Daily Bible Illustrations of Dr. Kitto, where it finds support, as shall be noticed in the sequel. The suggestion however is very modestly made; because it seems so strange that the most learned Biblical critics have not supported, or even mentioned it.

The opinion is, that this idol, and Jeroboam's calves afterwards spoken of, 1 Kings xii. 28, and Nebuchadnezzar's great image of gold, Dan. iii. 1, were made of wood and covered over with a layer, or thick plating of gold. This would make any image much more conspicuous and splendid, in proportion to the amount of precious metal used. Gold enough to make a small solid idol would make a magnificent image upon the other method. Four arguments may be used to support this inter-

pretation. Etymology allows it; other passages of Scripture favour it; history sustains it; the consistency of this inspired narrative implies and demands it.

I. Etymology allows it.

The word in the original Hebrew, here rendered *cast* or *molten*, does not necessarily mean that; but is in the precise form of a different word, from another root, and having a meaning better suited to this connection. We have in English too many instances of ambiguous words, to allow us to be surprised that the Hebrew also furnishes words that are spelled alike and yet have different meanings and derivations. The English word *cleave* has meanings directly opposite to each other. Compare Ps. cxxxvii. 6; “Let my tongue *cleave* to the roof of my mouth;” and Zech. xiv. 4: “The Mount of Olives shall *cleave* in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley.”

The Hebrew word, here rendered *molten*, is מַסְכָה. The very same form is found, Isa. xxv. 7; and is there rendered *a covering*. The meaning varies with the derivation. If derived from נָסַך with the signification of נָסַד, it signifies to *pour out*, as when metal is cast; but if derived from the same form with the signification of נָסַך, it signifies to *cover over*, to *cover with armour*, to *interweave*. Where this word occurs in connection with an

image we may understand it of an image covered with gold.

II. Other passages of Scripture favour this understanding of the matter.

In Deut. vii. 25, the Israelites are commanded to burn the graven images of the Canaanites, and not to desire the gold and silver that was upon them. Dr. Gill reads, “The raiment of gold or silver with which they were bedecked; or the plates of gold and silver with which they were covered; or any ornament about them, as chains and the like.” In Jer. x. 9, we read of “silver spread into plates,” and gold the work of cunning men. In the previous verse, 4, the prophet says these plates were used to deck an idol that had been fashioned from a tree. Gill says these plates were used to cover the idol, and “as Kimchi thinks, were fastened to the idol with nails,” so that *they*, i. e. the plates, rather than the image, could not be moved. But the sense here contended for, seems still more plainly meant in Isaiah xxx. 22. There the prophet declares that in the day of their obedience God’s people shall defile, i. e. treat as unclean, the silver covering of their idols and the golden covering of their images; and shall cast them aside as abominable. “The *coverings* here mentioned, may be understood of silver or gold plates, with which their images were overlaid.”* Dr. J A. Alexander renders it, “the case of thy

* Patrick and Lowth’s Commentary.

image of gold." And indeed in Isa. xl. 19, we seem to have the very process described. The word בָּסֵן is used, the workman *casteth* an image; but Dr. Alexander renders it thus: "the image a carver hath wrought; and a gilder with gold shall overlay it." And the words, פֶּסֶל וּמְסֻכָּה, "a graven and a molten image" are used together in Judges xvii. 4, for the idol made by Micah, which was evidently a single image. So in Isaiah xli. 7, the carpenter and the goldsmith are represented as helping each other to make an image; and the language of chapter xliv. seems more intelligible with the idea in our minds that a wooden image was first carved and then plated over. And this is exactly the description given in Habak. ii. 18, 19: "What profiteth the graven image, that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols? Wo unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and *there is no breath at all in the midst of it.*"

It is true that a different term is used for the *overlaying* so frequently mentioned afterwards; but it is just as true that the process of casting, as afterwards mentioned, is described in the use of a different word from the one rendered molten when speaking of the calf.

But that idols were thus made, is plain from other teachings.

III. Various passages from other histories show that the idols of heathenism were often covered with gold.

It is exceedingly difficult to trace the early history of almost any art. Even the art of printing, though so important and so modern, is claimed, in its earliest germs, for different times and persons. The art of working in metals was already ancient in the days of Moses: it dates back before the flood, Gen. iv. 22: its different processes may have already had their technical terms and particular workmen; and even the Midianites, when conquered by Moses, were accustomed to work in six different kinds of metals. In Num. xxxi. 22, gold, silver, iron, tin, lead and brass are mentioned; the last perhaps signifying copper. But we have no accurate account of the proficiency of these early times in these arts.

The apocryphal book of Baruch in the vi. chapter, professes to give an epistle of the prophet Jeremiah to the captives in Babylon.* The antiquity of the book is admitted, even by those who reject its authority. Its testimony on this matter is very plain. It says these idols are made “by workmen and by goldsmiths.” v. 45. “They are but of wood and *laid over with gold and with silver.*” v. 50. And again, “When the fire shall fall upon the houses of these gods of wood and of silver and of gold, their priests indeed will flee away and es-

* Many MSS. separate it from the book of Baruch.

cape, but they themselves shall be burnt in the midst like beams," v. 54. "Neither are these gods of wood and of stone and *laid over with gold and silver*, able to deliver themselves from thieves or robbers," v. 56, &c.

The celebrated Parthenon, or statue of Minerva, at Athens, the work of the great Grecian sculptor, Phidias, may be taken as an example of the mode often adopted in making images. Rollin twice speaks of this statue as a casting* of ivory and gold. "In reality, it was a wooden image, overlaid with ivory, forty-one and a half feet high; and he threw over it a garment of gold, either beaten or cast with such exquisite skill that it might be put off or on at pleasure."† So when the artist was publicly accused of embezzling part of the gold entrusted to him, this golden covering was actually taken off and weighed in his vindication.‡ Indeed, we may doubt whether gold was sufficiently plenty to allow that images should be otherwise made. Mr. Grote says that in the time of the Lydian Croesus, gold was so scarce in Greece that the Lacedæmonians were obliged to send to him "in order to provide enough of it for the gilding of a statue."§

Dr. Kitto says, "Pausanias describes a statue

* Rollin's Ancient History, ii. 119, 128.

† Encyclopedia Americana, Art. Phidias.

‡ Plutarch's Lives, Pericles. Grote's Greece, vi. 103.

§ Grote's Greece, ii. 229.

of Jupiter by Learchus,—the most ancient then known, having been executed in the eighth century before our era—formed of plates of brass hammered round and fastened by rivets, with a *case* or *foundation* of wood; exactly as the calf in the wilderness is supposed to have been constructed. Of this character are all* the most ancient metallic statues; and to this description of sculpture all the accounts of art to be found in Homer refer. A head of Osiris, with the internal wooden nucleus still subsisting within the metal coating, has been published among the antiquities of the Dilettante Society; and other examples of the similar application of ivory exist.”† Mr. Layard says, “According to Diodorus Siculus, the three great deities worshipped in the great temple at Babylon were Belus, (or Jupiter,) Hera and Rhea, whose statues were of beaten gold.”‡ He also quotes the passage before referred to in Baruch, and remarks of the Babylonish idols that “they were frequently made of wood laid over with gold.”§

And just such images of the ox or calf were certainly known to the Egyptians. Herodotus furnishes us with a remarkable instance, exactly illustrative of the case before us. He says that an Egyptian king, Mycerinus, the son of Cheops,

* The argument is strong enough without affirming that statues were *always* so made.

† Daily Biblical Illustrations, Moses, &c., 130.

‡ Nineveh, &c., ii. 342. § Ibid. 344.

wishing to pay unwonted honour to a deceased daughter, “caused a hollow wooden image of a cow to be made, and then, having covered it with gold, he put the body of his deceased daughter into it.”* This was then placed in a richly furnished chamber, and incense burned near it. Upon this passage, Sir Gardner Wilkinson furnishes this comment: “The gold used by the Egyptians for overlaying the faces of mummies and ornamental objects is often remarkable for its thickness.”†

Now if other historical teachings sustain the suggestion that Aaron’s calf at Horeb was not a solid casting, we may add,

IV. That the simple consistency of the Scriptural narrative is more easily vindicated, if the image was partly wood.

Aaron indeed says, “I cast the gold into the fire and there came out this calf.” But his apologetic words declare the truth but partially; and do not determine that the image was cast. He must have melted down the gold ornaments before using them for a new purpose. But he used a graving tool—perhaps to form the model—not *after*, as the English version reads; but *and* made the calf.

It has long been considered a hard question, How could Moses so completely destroy this image? He burnt it with fire, reduced it to powder, and made the Israelites drink of it. Various learned

* Herodotus, ii. 129.

† Rawlinson’s Herodotus, ii. 353, 354, n.

men have attempted to show that the ancients had the art of making gold potable.* We have too little information of the power they possessed in this way to deny this; but it seems a much simpler method of solving the matter, to believe that the calf was not solid. All the difficulties vanish at once if we judge that the image was but overlaid with gold. And it strengthens this view to remark that the historian writes like a man unaware that the thing here done would ever occasion any perplexity in his readers.

These reasons then are thus stated, to vindicate the opinion that the calf made by the Israelites at the foot of Sinai was large, easily seen in all the camp, and not of solid gold.†

* Jews' Letters to Voltaire, Letter V.

† This chapter was written in A. D. 1860. In Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, published A. D. 1863, I find the following: "It does not seem likely that the ear-rings would have provided the enormous quantity of gold required for a *solid* figure. More probably it was a wooden figure laminated with gold, a process which is known to have existed in Egypt. 'A *gilded* ox covered with a pall' was an emblem of Osiris. (Wilkinson, iv. 335.)" And in the fall of A. D. 1864, a splendid statue of Hercules was disinterred at Rome, having been lost for centuries. The sculptors there are in raptures over it; they describe it as "equal to the very finest that ever Greece produced;" and say it is covered with a *very thick and bright gilding*. The statue itself is bronze. The finder presented it to the Pope, who rewarded him with \$50,000.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INTERCESSION OF MOSES.

“ Throw away thy rod,
Though man frailties hath,
Oh, my God
Take the gentle path;
Thou art God,
Throw away thy wrath.” HERBERT.

THE service of Moses in the presence of God upon the mountain, was interrupted by the strange doings in the camp below. It had been an easy thing for God to take immediate vengeance against the rebellious race; but in the midst of his severest threatenings we may discern the tokens of his forbearance and mercy. Here we may see on the one hand the proofs of his displeasure, and on the other, proofs of wonderful faith on the part of Moses. God addresses the prophet saying, “ *Thy* people have corrupted themselves,” as if Israel was the special care of Moses, and God had cast them off, and would have nothing more to do with them. But the prophet is not willing to be placed in such a position, or to plead for his people as if God had no concern in them. So he replies, “ *Thy* people: thou broughtest them forth from Egypt; thou didst

make a covenant with their fathers; and reproach will be brought upon thy name for any evil done to them."

The intercession of Moses upon this occasion, and as renewed afterwards, ch. xxxiii. 12, is deeply instructive. We take no notice now of his remarkable disinterestedness, nor of his faithful attachment to a wayward people. Let us learn from Moses how to pray.

See, 1st, How careful he is not to offer any apology for the sin of the people. He knew that they were guilty, and that God was just in his declaration against them; and this was his own reason for executing summary vengeance upon the idolaters. It was from no disposition to extenuate sin, or to complain of God's justice, that he now stood as an intercessor for the guilty people. He shows us that the same man can be just, yet full of mercy. Indeed, in its highest sense, mercy is possible only when the claims of justice are recognized. The mercy that forgives guilt should be preceded by the full acknowledgment of guilt; and mercy is magnified because it differs from the sinner's deserts. And Moses thus teaches us that we can never acceptably approach God, for ourselves or others, if we come in any degree complaining of him as a hard Master. The righteousness of God must be acknowledged that the mercy of God may be secured. Forgiveness implies ill desert; where we approve, there is nothing to forgive.

2d. Moses teaches us that we may approach God in effectual prayer, even in circumstances that seem discouraging almost to hopelessness, and indeed when God himself seems to frown. God had just expressed great indignation against Israel; he seemed just about to execute his wrath against them; Moses cannot complain of all this as too severe; yet he ventures to stand in the breach and hold back the almighty arm! We cannot tell the power of prayer! We cannot decide that our very largest petitions are too great to ask of our God! There are indeed some rules to regulate our devotions. There are, 1st, Some things for which we should never ask, for we may know they will not be granted. God will not dishonour himself in any degree; and we may be guilty of presumption, and may tempt God, by putting his power and love and providence to unwarranted and needless tests. And there are, 2d, things which we may confidently expect of God, because of his promise. We may pray for the world's conversion as for that which shall certainly be; though our conceptions of time and means may be incorrect. Then, 3d, there are things which we may hope to receive from God, because they are favoured by his promises, by his own characteristics, and by his usual dealings with men, though we cannot certainly decide that the particular thing we ask shall surely be granted. God encourages us in various ways to pray, *e. g.* for the recovery of the sick; but we

may offer prayers that are neither presumptuous nor offensive, and which yet have not the issue we desire.

Then, 4th, besides these things, strong faith approaches God praying for blessings which he can consistently grant; but which he seems ready to refuse. It might seem presumption indeed to plead with God in the face of his own refusal to hear, if it were not for the teachings given by the Scriptures themselves upon this subject. We are always to pray and not to faint. Strong and ardent faith will not take the Divine silence; will scarcely take the Divine refusal, for an answer in prayer. Witness the praying Jacob; for when God said, Let me go, he replied, I will not let thee go. Witness the Syro-phœnician woman, repulsed by the silence and by the words of our Lord, but pressing on to gain her point. And though here Moses heard the voice of God saying, Let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot; he still boldly plead for Israel, and the Lord was entreated. Scarcely can our prayers be discouraged, if the Bible is made our guide to prayer.

3d. Moses teaches us a strong plea in prayer; not Israel's good, but the honour of Jehovah.

He plead that if this just wrath was carried out, it would occasion reproach upon the name of God among the Egyptians. It is true, God can vindicate all his righteous acts, however severe they seem. But from the success of this plea we

may learn to plead with God for the apparent honour or dishonour that may be cast upon his holy name. We can use no more prevalent plea, and we are never nearer right, than when we are most concerned for the glory of our God. Our prayers are too often the mere dictate of selfish considerations. We desire our advantage rather than the Divine glory. "We ask and receive not," because we would consume upon self, what we desire from God. If we studied more in what the Divine honour consists; were more deeply concerned for it; and sought more to promote it, our prayers would be better directed and more largely granted.

There is one other reflection which we may justly indulge, in view of this prayer of Moses. He stood upon this momentous occasion as a mediator between an offended God and his offended people. How dreadful the issue, if Moses had proved incompetent for this trying position. When all the elders of the congregation, with Aaron and Hur at their head, had stood aside from their duty and were involved in the common guilt, how great the responsibility of this eminent man! How much was dependent upon his faithfulness! We have no intimation indeed that it would have been any departure from duty upon the part of Moses, if he had yielded when God threatened to destroy Israel. That destruction would have been an act of just displeasure; and the covenant made with Abraham could have been still fulfilled

by making a great people of the seed of Moses. But how much more honourable for Moses; and how much better for the display of the Divine glory, is this prevalent prayer! Men lose nothing before God by setting aside all selfish thoughts, and aiming at God's glory. And happy were the people of Israel, on that dark and sinful day, that a mediator, so self-denying and so faithful, to plead their cause with God, stood upon the mount.

Yet great as is the honour due to Israel's intercessor on Mount Sinai, our Mount Zion can tell us of another Mediator, "counted worthy of more glory than Moses." Heb. iii. 3. Like Moses, upon this occasion, he partakes not of the sin for whose pardon he pleads; he makes no apology for it, but recognizes the justice of the wrath declared against it; and, beyond Moses, he bears the curse due to it upon himself. Like Moses he vindicates and pleads for the honour and glory of God himself. But in all respects, how much greater the weight of responsibility he faithfully bore. How dreadful would have been our position, as subject to the wrath of God, if no such Mediator had come in between us and the dreadful stroke.

Nor is the intercession of our Mediator yet complete. He ever liveth to make it; and is now at the right hand of God to plead for the guilty.

“Father, he cries, forgive their sins,
For I myself have died;
And then he shows his open veins,
And pleads his wounded side.”

Happy are they who put their cause into his
hands. Him the Father heareth always.

CHAPTER IX.

IDOLATRY PUNISHED.

WHILE the lawgiver was upon Sinai receiving the commandments of Jehovah, the people below were violating their solemn covenant, and transgressing the express law which his voice had spoken in their ears. They had been led forth from Egypt as from a land of bondage, yet in their hearts they turned back thither, Acts vii. 39; as from a land of idolatry, yet they imitated the Egyptian gods, and perhaps esteemed their golden calf only more sacred* because made of the Egyptian jewels. The Egyptian worship was accompanied with such corrupt and vile practices that the heathen historian Herodotus, as often as he approaches this subject, refuses to name the method of their sacred rites;† yet even these, the Israelites adopted; and the sacred writers will not pollute the page of Scripture with describing what a heathen would not write. They veil the iniquity in the record, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose

* Warburton's Divine Legation, ii. 303.

† Herodotus, ii. § 61, 132.

up to play." Ex. xxxii. 6; 1 Cor. x. 7. The Apostle significantly quotes these words; and their latent meaning would easily be understood by the generation to which he wrote; especially at Corinth. There is this marked and important distinction between true and false systems of religion, that the errors and iniquities of false systems belong to them, and are enjoined by them; and the errors and iniquities of those who profess the true religion, are in contradiction of its principles. Bad men may be found under any system of religion; crimes of great pollution and violence have been committed by men professing all creeds; but surely it is a very important difference, when one man does wickedly in *spite of* the restraining influences of a pure religion; and another does wickedly *through* the depraving teachings of a corrupt religion. As to principles, Christianity inculcates "whatsoever things are pure," and these only; but the vilest and most evil things have formed part of heathen worship and heathen injunction. And the corruptions of Christianity, even in our day, are marked by vile declensions towards heathenish licentiousness.

There was everything in the worship of the Israelites to provoke the Lord to jealousy. They made and worshipped an idol as his representative; and this, before his very presence; they joined to this the vilest licentiousness; and to do all these things, they renounced the covenant they had so

recently made. How wonderfully, in this scene, and in regard to the continual and flagrant crimes of men in every land and age, does God show his long-suffering towards sinners. Perhaps Moses would scarcely have prayed as he did, if he had fully understood the sin of the people. Before he saw what Israel had done, he prayed. Yet it may be that his prayers would still have been for the sinning people, as he repeated his petitions, even after he had seen their idolatry, and shown his zeal for God in suppressing it. One thing we know; that a greater Mediator than Moses well knew all the sins for which he sought forgiveness, not merely by prayers and tears, but by bearing in his own person the weight of Divine wrath which they called forth. Well may our poet say,

“This was compassion like a God,
That though the Saviour knew,
The price of pardon was his blood,
His pity ne'er withdrew.”

Moses came down from the mount at the command of God. It would seem that a little distance from the place of this great interview, he was joined by Joshua, and they two descended together. At first, it would seem, he said nothing to Joshua of the Divine declaration concerning the sin of the people; and either because their road wound around the mountain, and their view was intercepted by the uneven surface; or because they were surrounded by clouds that hid the valleys be-

low, they were unable to see what was going on in the camp. But the sounds of revelry rang up the side of the mountain, and caught their ears. Joshua understood it as a token of war; but Moses, who knew better, or who waited to hear the sounds more plainly, decided that it was the voice of singing and carousal. As they came nearer, they saw the image and the dancing. They were still on the side of the mountain; and we may infer that the calf was not a mere miniature, but an idol large enough to be seen before they reached the camp. Moses then had in his hands the two tables of stone, upon which the Divine finger had written the Ten Commandments. His first act of indignant zeal was to cast these tables out of his hands, and dash them in pieces. There is no disapprobation expressed of this act anywhere in the Bible; and therefore we should not regard it as a rash and inconsistent result of hasty anger. It was highly significant of the fact that the people themselves had broken the law written upon these tables. Indeed as he knew their sin before he came down, this cannot be esteemed a hasty thing; it may even have been by Divine direction to impress the people with a deeper sense of their great sinfulness. These tables were afterwards replaced by two others, hewn by Moses, upon which the law was again written by the finger of God. This second pair of tables were sacredly preserved by the Jews, laid up in the ark of the covenant; they were transferred to the temple of

Solomon, 1 Kings viii. 9, when it was dedicated; and were finally lost when that holy house was destroyed by the Babylonians.

But Moses was not content to signify the sin of Israel by breaking the tables. He proceeded immediately to vindicate the honour of the law, and to execute judgment upon the idol and upon the guilty people. We need not be surprised that his proceedings are summary. There was no need of process and trial, when the transgressors were caught in the act. And we see here not simply the boldness of Moses in withstanding the whole congregation, but the sacred power of right, even when it is but one man against a multitude. He has no hesitation; and they venture no resistance or remonstrance. We are told his first act was to destroy the idolatrous image. The destruction of this was easy, if the image was not a solid one. And that he burnt it with fire seems to imply this. If it was solid gold, then his method of effecting its destruction surpasses our knowledge of using gold: though this is no valid objection to his direct statement. Yet it is not at all needful to declare that any part of the gold was dissolved. Moses says himself that he “burnt it with fire and stamped it, and ground it very small, even until it was as small as dust;” and he cast this dust into the brook that descended out of the mount. Deut. ix. 21. Of this brook then he made them drink. This, like the breaking of the tables, is an act chiefly important

for its significance. It doubtless importeth that they should receive in themselves the just reward of their guilt.

But the zeal of the lawgiver did not stop here. Moved doubtless by a Divine impulse, he stood forth among the people, and called for a division, to know who were truly the friends of God. We may judge that many of those who made no interference with the scheme of idolatry, yet neither approved of it, nor joined in it. We cannot vindicate their silence in this case; yet that was a less degree of guilt, which refused to take part in the scenes of riot and idolatry. When many of the tribe of Levi joined themselves to him, Moses bade them go forth in the camp, and slay the idolaters, paying no regard to kindred or affection. The number of the slain was about three thousand men.* This is a much smaller number than was afterwards slain at Baal-Peor. This may have been because this sin, though very great, partook more of the character of a first offence than the later idolatry; and therefore met with less severe punishment; or because those only who were interrupted in the lewdness of their worship, were slain. That too great punishment was not inflicted upon them in this slaughter, may be argued from the fact that direct plagues from God were still sent upon the

* The Vulgate says 23,000. But this number belongs to Numb. xxv. 9, which may have been between 23 and 24,000; and in round figures, either. See 1 Cor. x. 8.

people for this sin. And the Jews still have a saying, that in every generation there is an ounce of the sin of the golden calf. Though God dealt with them in long-suffering, it was not that they were allowed to think slightly of this defection from him.

Perhaps human history has no stranger or darker chapter than that which gives the records of idolatry. Heathenism is indeed older than the earliest writings of revealed religion; yet the first knowledge of man in religion revealed the true God. But, as Paul expressly teaches, men did not like to retain in their knowledge the glorious and incorruptible God; and they exchanged him for the images of the basest things. Rom. i. Corruption came in gradually. Image worship was always representative; and learned men even now strive to draw wisdom from the ancient systems of Mythology. But, alas! it was such wisdom as turned the minds of men away from the true God. These various systems and modes of idol-worship were alike in their origin: "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge." Men might bow to the rising sun, as in Persia; or kiss the hand to the moon, as in Arabia; or fear and propitiate Satan, as in the entire continent of Africa; or deify men, as in India; or reverence the lowest animals and garden herbs, as in Egypt; or dignify their temples with the most splendid specimens of human art, as in polished Greece; but the root of all is

the same. It seems more strange that the Jewish people, though clearly taught, and having no false gods of their own, should so often fall into idolatry and borrow the gods of other nations. Not only at the foot of Sinai; but indeed through all their history, up to the time of the Babylonish captivity, they were prone to idol-worship. And the Christian church followed in the same beaten path of corrupt human nature. Christianity made no more provision for idols and idol-worship, than did the ancient Judaism; yet as the church became corrupt, festivals, ceremonies, images and prayers were borrowed from Paganism. The chief ceremonies of the Romish church; the worship of images, the devotion to saints, the tutelary powers assigned to particular patrons, have no place in the Christian Scriptures; but are all borrowed from Paganism. A tendency to idolatry is the great plague spot of human nature; and Paul gives us the single explanation of all these varied forms of false worship: men do “not like to retain God in their knowledge.”

And if, under less perfect teachings, men substitute idols for the true God, the same aversion to the living God takes a different form where the Bible is more abundantly read, and spiritual teachings are more clearly given. Men are little tempted to bow the knee before an idol among us; but they can and do give the homage of the heart to meaner things than God. It is a singular fact

that only where religion is pure in its teachings, and spiritual in its demands, do men decline to make any religious professions. But the root of irreligion is the same as the root of idolatry. Something is substituted for the honour due to God, because they do not like to retain him in their knowledge. Rom. i. 28.

VOL. II.—9

CHAPTER X.

VISIONS OF THE DIVINE GLORY DESIRED.

“None can mount
Up to thy mysteries; reason’s brightest spark,
Though kindled by Thy light, in vain would try,
To trace Thy counsels, infinite and dark;
And thought is lost ere thought can soar so high,
Even like past moments in eternity.” DERZHAVIN.

THE intercession of Moses was not completed when he came down from the mount, and interrupted the worship of the golden calf. It is not indeed the usual method of the Divine mercy to grant the immediate cry of prayer. God tries the patience, as well as the faith of his people; Moses received no reply to his first prayer; and in this there was the further propriety, that then the people were still engaged in their idolatry. On the next day after the calf had been demolished, and the work of slaughter completed among the idolaters, Moses again ascended into the presence of God, and renewed his supplications. The form of his prayer, “Forgive . . . or blot me out of thy book,” especially as compared with an expression of similar import in the writings of Paul, (See

Rom. ix. 3,) has been variously understood. We may only now say of it, that it denotes the strong interest and deep feeling of the petitioner: and at such a time even the best instructed mind cannot be judged of, as if every word used should bear a strict interpretation. That Moses or Paul could deliberately and really wish to be separated from God, with all the aversion to him that necessarily belongs to such a separation, is not to be believed; and what is an impossibility becomes an absurdity when it is added, that all this is for love's sake. Men cannot so desire God's glory as to be willing to hate him that it may be promoted. True love for their people and anxious pleadings for their salvation, we may learn from the strong language of Moses and Paul; and no more need be sought for.

But still the pleading Moses received no reply to the prayer he had offered for the people. Rather, God spoke in terms of displeasure, while he bestowed yet larger favours upon the lawgiver himself. He spoke of withdrawing from the sinning congregation the favours before given; and bade Moses take down the tabernacle, and pitch it afar from the camp; a significant proof that the Lord was grieved with them and had gone out of their midst. Upon this the congregation mourned, and put off their ornaments. "Note, of all the bitter fruits and consequences of sin, that which true penitents most lament and dread, is God's depart-

ure from them.”—*Henry*. Yet there were two things to show the Divine forbearance, while the people were called to deep repentance. *First*, That the people were still permitted to seek God, though he had removed his tabernacle. He was not so far off but that he could be found of those who diligently sought him. *Second*, That their faithful leader and friend was in such favour with God. Moses was allowed to enter the tabernacle, and the pillar of cloud, which, it is conjectured, had disappeared at the making of the calf, stood, not over the camp, but at the door where Moses entered; and “God spake unto Moses face to face, even as a man speaketh unto his friend.” If God had been displeased at the importunity of Moses, he would not have shown him these new favours. When our prayers are not granted, the Lord’s continued forbearance may encourage us to pray still more. The people gladly accepted Moses as their mediator; and reverently bowed before God as Moses entered the tabernacle. They thus show their real respect and confidence in him. Men rail against the righteous in prosperity; but when a time of trouble comes they desire an interest in their prayers and rely upon their influence.

After his special prayer, and the definite and gracious reply of which we will speak again, Moses asked a great petition: “I beseech thee show me thy glory!”

We may regard this prayer as both proper and

improper: an evidence of growing sanctification in Moses, but a proof also of finite wisdom. It is the natural result of God's grace in hearing prayer, that we are made bold to ask still larger petitions; and this is the great mercy of God that he designs to encourage us in so doing. So that Newton's hymn, that reverses a beggar's plea, is indeed the language of prayer.

“T'were folly to preteud
 I never begged before;
Or if thou now befriend,
 I'll trouble thee no more;
Thou often hast relieved my pain,
 And often I must come again.”

The prayer of Moses was just such as an eminent and growing believer might offer; a desire to know more of God. Because it had this aspect of propriety, God was not displeased at it; but measurably granted his request. Yet it was an unwise prayer, for Moses asked more than he himself was able to bear. Happily for us, God gives us the benefit of his wisdom in answering our prayers; and if we knew all, we would perhaps find quite as much reason to thank him for withholding things unwisely desired, as for anything he has ever bestowed. He declared to Moses that no man could see his face and live. We cannot understand how the mind of a man would be affected by the sight of the Divine glory. But we know that when Daniel saw a less glorious sight, he fell as one

dead at the angel's feet. It is said that an Eastern prince, accustomed to magnificent idols, once insisted with a Jewish rabbi, that he should show him his God. The rabbi vainly endeavoured to impress upon him that he did not worship an idol, the work of men's hands, but an eternal and spiritual being; but failing to satisfy him, at length he took him forth at noon-day, and bade him look steadily up at the sun. The light, of course, dazzled and almost blinded him; and he declared that he could not gaze upon it. "That sun," said the rabbi, "is the creature and servant of my God. If you cannot look upon the servant, how can you behold the face of its Maker and Master?"

This illustration does not rise to the full dignity of the subject. Not simply as too bright for the mere visual organs, may we believe that the sight of God would prove too much for man. But we know that overpowering emotions, even in regard to earthly things, have destroyed human life. Fear and joy and anger and grief sometimes kill. The vision of God's face must be reserved for another state of being, beyond the feebleness of our mortality. Yet God promised Moses such a diminished view of his glory as he was able to bear.

It is remarkable, so far as we understand the sacred narrative, that this favoured servant saw no visible glory. Of this he had already seen all that he could endure. He seems to have regarded the glorious sight already granted, Ex. xxiv. 10, 17,

as but a magnificent cloud that veiled the Real Presence. But it may be that we are here taught that God's true glory is not in magnificent forms or splendid brightness; not in physical but in spiritual things; not in what he can do or show, but in **WHAT HE IS.** God has nothing more glorious than **HIS OWN CHARACTER;** his **MORAL PERFECTIONS** that can be revealed only to moral and intelligent beings, are his true glory. So when God gave Moses the highest display of his glory that mortal nature is able to bear, he proclaimed **HIS NAME!** And here we see how harmonious are the teachings of the prophets in both the Old and New Testaments, that the terms may differ, but they express the same meaning. The apostles tell us that God is Love, and commends his love to us as his most remarkable exhibition of himself. And here God proclaims the harmony of his long-suffering and goodness and truth and mercy, with yet the maintenance of his justice. Indeed the entire teaching of the Bible, as revealing God's great glory to man, is summed up in the single sentence so spoken to Moses in the cleft of the rock on Sinai. How it seems to magnify the gospel of our salvation, that God has no greater thing to reveal of himself than to make known the harmony of his attributes in the forgiveness of man's sin; that human salvation is his great work; and that long-suffering and forgiveness are the first aspects of his character towards us!

It is true indeed that some men are prepared to understand this revelation of God better than others. Thus it is with all human affairs. Though Rittenhouse fainted with excess of delight when he saw a rare astronomical phenomenon, many another man might have gazed upon the transit of Venus with scarcely a throb of emotion. We want more than a sight of wonder; we want the heart to appreciate it; and the better we are thus prepared, the more exalted are the emotions produced within us. When a man's habits of thought and feeling are usually elevated and dignified, he is better prepared to comprehend yet more excellent things. And we may justly say that no thoughts are more elevating to the mind of man than thoughts of God. Cicero narrates an anecdote of the ancient philosopher, Simonides, that being asked, What is God? he requested time to frame his answer. After some time of consideration he several times desired longer delay; and being asked why this was so, he replied, "Because the longer I consider the subject the more profound it is, and the more difficult does it appear to frame a correct reply." To the same effect is a paragraph in Robert Hall's celebrated discourse on Modern Infidelity.

"The idea of the Supreme Being has this peculiar property; that, as it admits of no substitute, so, from the first moment it is formed, it is capable of continual growth and enlargement. God himself is immutable; but our conception of his char-

acter is continually receiving fresh accessions, is continually growing more extended and resplendent, by having transferred to it new elements of beauty and goodness; by attracting to itself, as a centre, whatever bears the impress of dignity, order, or happiness. It borrows splendour from all that is fair, subordinates to itself all that is great, and sits enthroned on the riches of the universe.”* And perhaps few men have ever lived who were better prepared to know God than was Moses. His thoughts of God had already been great and long indulged; and his very prayer at such a time as this, shows an elevation above earth and a preparation for heaven, altogether remarkable. Here is a man who instantly rejects the offer, when God is ready to place him upon the highest pinnacle of earthly ambition, and to make him the father of a great nation: and the highest wish of this good man is to know more of God! How small a hold upon the spiritual mind of Moses had self and earth and time, in comparison with God and heaven and eternity!

And if to know God is the highest attainment and the highest joy for man, how consoling the reflection that the humblest of us can attain to this. God does not offer us perhaps, the riches or hon-

* Hall’s Works, I. 30. We may well associate with these reflections the Ontological argument of Anselm, as given by Dr. Shedd, History Christian Doctrine, i. 231. See also Hagenbach His. Doct. i 45.

ours or ease of this life; but he does invite us to know and rejoice in him. It may be happy for us that we cannot have the things we might choose for our own injury. Few of us would be as unselfish as Moses. But we may and should long for that knowledge of him, to which we may attain.

But our highest attainments here are partial. God kept back from Moses the glorious knowledge for which he was unprepared. Though he stood face to face with God, a better vision was reserved. Though God revealed his name, heaven is the abode of more excellent glory. The brightest sight here is “through a glass darkly.” Yet nothing that we shall learn in heaven will contradict what we may easily learn here. Doubtless some misconception is inseparable from partial knowledge: yet what God communicates to us here is true knowledge, though not so full; true glory, though not so bright; true life, though not in the unfailing vigour of eternity. What Paul says of the Old Testament teachings as compared with those of the New, 2 Cor. iii., may much more be said of earth as compared with heaven. Our glorious things seem to have no glory by reason of the exceeding glory to come. Light is valuable when darkness covers the earth; but our best lamps grow dim in the sunlight; and the sun itself is not so dazzling as the heavenly glory. Acts xxvi. 13.

The glory of heaven will be more excellent than

that of earth; but we shall study the same truths that are taught us here. The same glorious law of God that has been made known to us here, will, as to its essential principles, remain the permanent and eternal rule of duty; and God's intelligent creatures will obey the first and second tables of the law of Sinai by their love to God and to his creatures. A service of love, perfect and universal, shall do his will in heaven; and love and law shall dwell in harmony. And in that glorious abode the redemption of Christ will never be absent from the minds and hearts of redeemed men. We may speak of Calvary while we linger here among the awful teachings of Sinai; for they both are in harmony: if the law leads to Christ, Christ teaches of the law, and magnifies its excellence. And heaven shall be radiant with Christ. The songs of the redeemed shall be unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his blood. We shall know the same Christ and study the same redemption in the clearer light of eternity. IN HIM is our Jehovah, "the Lord God, merciful and gracious, . . . forgiving iniquity." Hidden in the cleft Rock, we learn this lesson!

CHAPTER XI.

THE VEIL UPON THE PROPHET'S FACE.

"How slowly ripen powers ordained to last!
The old may die, but must have lived before;
So Moses in the vale an acorn cast,
And Christ was shadowed by the tree it bore."

STERLING.

VARIOUS writers upon these scenes at Sinai have associated the glory of Moses upon the mount, with the bright transfiguration of Christ in later days. It may be true that the place where Moses stood is the same spot where Elijah beheld the wonders of God, 1 Kings xix. 11; and the forty days' fastings of both these prophets are not without their lessons to us; though in duration they were unquestionably of a supernatural character. So Bishop Hall says, "I see Moses the receiver of the law, Elijah the restorer of the law, Christ the fulfiller of the old law and the author of the new, all fasting forty days; and these three great fasters, I find together glorious on Mount Tabor." So Calvin argues that in giving a law directly from heaven, Moses gave a full attestation of his Divine legation by enduring a fast which evidently exceeded the powers of hu-

manity; and gave evidence of the law's majesty by the angelic glory of its minister. Yet we should not overlook the statement of Moses himself that this supernatural fasting had also regard to the recent sin of the people and to his intercession for them. Deut. ix. 18. We are not taught here to consider sin as a light matter; or God as carelessly forgiving. We should not be done with our repentings even when the Lord is gracious, Ez. xvi. 63, nor should we cease to make humble mention of past sins, though he has blotted them out.

When Moses came down from the mount after so long a season of holy intercourse with God, his face shone with so bright a splendour that the people could not look upon him. As he was unable to see God so they were not able to bear even that reflection of the Divine glory that remained upon his features after he had left the Divine presence. It is proper for us to judge that the communications of Divine grace to the soul of this holy man, were far more excellent than the visible glory of his face. How unable is man to know God, we may learn from the record that the Israelites could not look upon Moses. He was obliged to cover his face with a veil while he spoke to them. But here is an important lesson of the humility of true piety; "Moses knew not that his face shone." It is not those who say by word or manner, "Come not nigh us for we are holier than ye," who are truly holy. That true beauty, either of character or of

usefulness, which God puts upon his servants, is not only far separated from pride and boasting, but is usually accompanied by an unconsciousness of that excellency that is so manifest to others. The humility that is conscious of its abasement is not genuine.

When our Lord teaches us, “Enter into thy closet . . . and pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father that seeth in secret shall reward thee openly,” Matt. vi. 6, he shows us the true method of securing the Divine favour, even by communion with God; while at the same time the influence gained with God will not be lost in its power over men. Whether it be because a deeper sense of our own unworthiness ever accompanies a larger measure of Divine grace upon us; or because like Moses with distinguished privileges, we are made acquainted with far better things yet unreached by us, those who know most of God are least puffed up by their knowledge. Even Paul humbly calls himself “less than the least of all saints.” Eph. iii. 8. Happy are they who bring honour upon God and religion, by meekness of temper, by holiness of tongue and act, by zeal for doing good, by affections fixed on things above; while yet they make no assumption of superiority and know not that their faces shine!

It is thought by some that the nimbus or rays of light usually painted in the pictures of ancient artists around the heads of sacred persons, origi-

nated in this account of the shining face of Moses. We have doubtless all seen engravings of the Virgin Mary, and of Jesus with rays of glory around the head, as if the face shone. Yet other accounts ascribe this method of representing the sacred head to a heathen origin and to a far inferior significance.* And Virgil may tell us that a lambent flame playing around the head was held by the ancient Romans as a symbol of the Divine favour and protection. It is customary with the old artists to paint "horns" upon the head of Moses. This may be seen in the engraving of the statue of Moses designed by Michael Angelo for the monument of Pope Julius II., erected in the basilica of San Pietro, in Vincoli. The monument was spoiled in the execution, but the colossal statue is one of the master's finest works. The idea of the horns is derived from the Vulgate version of Ex. xxxiv. 29. *Et ignorabat quod cornuta esset facies sua.*† See

* Ewbank's Life in Brazil, 215. See the full discussion, without referring to this passage, in Didron's Christian Iconography.

† The Hebrew verb signifies to shoot out rays, as of light; the corresponding noun signifies a horn. So the Hiphil participle is used, Ps. Ixix. 32, (Heb.,) and rendered "having horns," very properly; and in Hab. iii. 4, the English version is "He had horns coming out of his hand." The Douay version of Ex. xxxiv. 29, is, "He knew not that his face was horned." But the Lxx. has δεδόξασται. Beams of glory shone out from his face, like rays of light.

There is a curious disquisition in the disputations of Sam. Ben. Carpzov on the horned face of Moses. He speaks of various existing coins which are stamped with the horned face of Moses, but argues learnedly to prove them supposititious. In the course of the

the Iconographic Encyclopedia, iv. 437, and the plate referred to there.

But it would not be proper for us to pass over these teachings of the shining face of Moses without remembering the teaching also of Paul, that the veil upon the prophet's face before the Israelites was emblematic of his own institutions as placed before their eyes. The apostle tells us that there was great glory in the teachings, in the types, in the services of the Mosaic economy; but a glory which the Jewish people did not then, and do not now see. He says, We, as ministers of the New Testament, are not like Moses, who concealed the glory of his face, typical of concealed meaning in his teachings; but we use great plainness of speech. If we should now undertake an exposition of that remarkable passage, 2 Cor. iii. 6-18, we must needs show the points of contrast between the Old and the New Dispensations; and the superior glory and excellence that belongs to the New. But the particular points most prominent in the apostle's mind are two. First, That the end of the two dispensations is the same: to wit, that they are both designed to reveal Christ. The children of Israel had a veil over their faces; they did not see, they

argument he refers to the fact that the ancient poets spoke of Bacchus as "Liber Cornutus."

In conclusion he briefly refers to the practice of painting Moses with horns, but says it springs from misconceiving the meaning of Ex. xxxiv. 29, 35, and ingeniously refers to the tongues of fire on Pentecost as explaining the shining glory of the lawgiver's face.

do not now understand the great teachings of their lawgiver and “of all their prophets, from Samuel and those that followed after who have likewise foretold of these things.” Acts iii. 24. Christ and his salvation are the great themes of Divine institutions and Divine messengers from the altar of Abel onwards, through the entire history of the church, which stands only to proclaim him. And, Second, The New Testament chiefly differs from the Old in its *explicit* teachings of Christ. The blinded mind is enlightened; the veil that hides the glory of prophetic revelations is taken away in Christ. We use great plainness of speech. *Explicit* revelations, as compared with dark enigmas and mysterious types; a direct tendency to justification and life, rather than condemnation and death; the more direct and copious influences of the Holy Spirit; and the permanency of our dispensation, while that of Moses was transient, evince the greater glory of these latter days.

But happiest is he, in any age of these Divine teachings, who learns the most from them of CHRIST. He is the great object of them all. To him, long before the times of Moses, our father Abraham rejoiced to look forward. Jno. viii. 56. But how favoured are the times in which we live, for the teachings that are given to us, and for the direct influences which these glorious revelations are designed to have upon our characters. Our Lord himself utters words upon this point, not

simply applicable to the generation that was favoured with his personal ministry, but even more forcible as applied to us who may know more of him, his person, and character, and work, than could be known while he was yet upon the earth. Jno. vii. 39. He says that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see the days which we see. Nothing is revealed in the Book of God at all to be compared with the great central figure for which all else is revealed, that is, CHRIST; and to no former time, either for abundance of instructions, or for readiness of access to them, has CHRIST been made more fully known than to us. And as by constantly studying the face of a beloved friend, we not only catch but copy the expression that affords us so much delight; as children, not only by nature, but by imitation, grow more and more like those dear parents whose every movement they study, and whose every habit they imitate; so believers in Christ have a blessed volume of Divine truth in which, "as in a mirror," the apostle says; or to use a figure furnished by our modern arts, as in a stereoscope, two pictures, painted with infallible correctness by Divine light from heaven, upon the pages of the Old and New Testaments, bring out one life-like, glorious portrait of Christ; and we, when we gaze long enough and steadily enough to see that the two are one; when we see Christ in relief in the entire Bible, should study this picture with a delight that makes

it ever fresh; and become ourselves more like Christ because we study him. We cannot so study Christ without becoming like him; for the apostle says that the Spirit of God while we look to Christ, changes us from one degree of glory to another, till we become like him. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

How many are there, alas, who still read the Old Testament with the veil upon the face. Turn to the Lord, O, blinded reader, and the veil shall be taken away! Plead for the Spirit's teachings; for where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. And that is not genuine piety that is not much conversant with Christ; that is not ever delighted with thoughts of Christ; that cannot stand anywhere upon the field of instruction or duty, and look to Christ. It is the Spirit's office, which he never fails to perform, to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us. Jno. xvi. 14, 15. "If you wish to have the grand secret of religion couched in a single maxim; if you would learn how to be reconciled and how to abide so; if you would be strengthened against temptation; if you would be holy and happy, take this rule: LOOK TO CHRIST. Just so much piety have you as you have CHRIST,"* the object of your knowledge and faith and love and imitation and obedience. It is our great duty and privilege to study the person and

* The eloquent passage from Dr. J. W. Alexander's Sacramental Discourses, p. 82, seq., I alter to suit more closely my preceding thoughts.

work of Christ in all the Bible. It should be our delightful task to recognize his dignity; to admire his condescension: to sympathize with his great work; to rejoice in his grace; to depend upon his promises; to obey all his commands. Here is a book whose various teachings we should thoroughly know, and whose harmony we should see upon this, its greatest theme. Take up, not only the New Testament, but the Old by the very side of the New; read both over and over again with this very thing in view, to know what they say of Christ. Consider that the teachings of our Lord himself, after his resurrection, and the constant teachings of his apostles in the Jewish synagogues, were just these things, CHRIST IN ALL THE BIBLE; the New Testament the complement of the Old; the Old foretelling, the New fulfilling: and this glorious portrait the common object of both. See Luke xxiv. 27, 45; Acts iii. 24; x. 43; xxvi. 22, 23, &c. While you look upon Christ as here exhibited, his own light will shine upon the blessed features, the lineaments "will be radiant with higher and higher illumination; each adorable feature will be more distinct and familiar; you will know it better, as the face of a friend, of a brother, of a CHRIST, (for all other words come short;) you will feel the fleshly tablet of your heart receiving the rays from this 'shining in the face of Jesus;' and as you feel the reflection of this Sun of righteousness you will own an unwonted glow; beholding as in a mirror

the glory of the Lord, you will be changed into the same image." Seeing him, you become like him. Holding the soul in loving contemplation upon these sacred teachings, the Spirit of God, with a pencil of heavenly light, draws the image of Christ, a lovely cherished portrait upon the fleshly table of the heart.

The deliberate and perpetually recurring study of Christ in both the Old and New Testaments "is the principal means of grace. *If you know Christ you know everything.* Here there can be no excess." You cannot find him too soon, or trace him too long in these Divine revelations; since the first promise of him is found early in the first records of the Bible, and the last tract of the sacred writings stretches his influence over all the future of human history, and invokes his coming at the consummation of all things. You cannot exalt him above the place he occupies in this great system of salvation; since all the prophets testify to him, bow down before him as servants at the feet of their master, and never utter a note of warning, lest we should think too much of Christ. Never fear that the constant study of Christ "will make you a one-sided Christian. It is the very means of symmetry, because it is looking at the central point of the painting. All other truths, as subordinate, will fall, of themselves, into their true relation." This is to be in the highest sense CHRISTIANS, that we study Christ; know Christ; love Christ; fol-

low Christ; and are by contemplation changed more and more into the same image of CHRIST.

Let us open our Bibles every day to learn of Him, “to whom all the prophets give witness.” Let us think of him in the dazzling and uncreated glory which he had with the Father before the world was, John xvii. 5; let us study him in the types and services and prophecies of the Old Testament, from which now the veil is taken away; let us follow him on earth to Bethlehem and Egypt; to Jordan and the wilderness, mingling with the multitudes who hear his public words, and penetrating, as is our privilege, with his most favoured disciples to his places of retirement, to hear the whisperings of his private intercessions, to see the glory of his transfiguration, and to share the communion and sympathy of the last supper with the twelve. Weighing his words, considering his miracles, drinking in of his spirit, let us pass with reverent step to Gethsemane; and follow him with amazement to Herod’s and Pilate’s halls, to Calvary and the cross.

“There, adoring at his feet,
Mark that miracle of time,
God’s own sacrifice complete!”

Linger at the cross till you learn its mystery; Christ the wisdom and the power of God unto salvation. Come there a burdened pilgrim and depart with peace in your heart, new raiment upon you, and a mark upon your forehead, with leapings for joy and the song upon your lips:

"Blest cross! blest sepulchre! blest rather be
The man who there was put to death for me!"

Forget not the sepulchre! For it is open; for it is empty; for he has arisen; yea also is even at the right hand of God and maketh intercession for us. And they who follow Christ thus far, shall follow further; they who here have his image in their hearts, shall have a more complete image there. We shall follow him upwards; we shall be with him; we shall be like him; for we shall see him, not in a glass, but face to face, and AS HE IS!
1 Cor. xiii. 12; 1 John iii. 2.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DIVINE PRESENCE.

THERE remains one other matter to be considered of these pleadings of Moses, in which we should take some interest. Because of their great sin as specially against the Divine honour, Jehovah proposed to send an angel to lead the people to Canaan, and not himself to go as before-time; lest they should provoke him to their own destruction. These heavy tidings filled the people with mourning; and Moses made this a matter of special and earnest intercession. Indeed so much did he lay this great request to heart, that he wished not to go at all; he would rather perish then and there, than attempt to go, with any less than a Divine Guide. "If thy presence go not, carry us not up hence." It seems to be the teaching of this expression, supported by an interesting array of other proofs, that Jehovah himself had hitherto been the Leader of Israel; and that Moses could be content with no leader less than he. The Second Person of the Trinity, he who afterwards "became flesh and dwelt among us," was the Guide of the people.

We have already seen that the Angel who appeared to Moses in the burning bush was the Un-created One; the Second Person of the Godhead. And long before the days of Moses, Jehovah had talked with Abraham, delivered Lot from Sodom, and wrestled in the form of a man, with prevailing Israel. The Head of the church has ever watched over her interests; and revealed himself graciously to his people. So in the deliverance from Egypt the REMARKABLE PILLAR which led the way of the people, was the symbol of the Divine Presence; and the people were expressly warned that the Angel sent with them was one of more than created dignity. “Beware of him and obey his voice; provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions, for MY NAME IS IN HIM.” Ex. xxiii. 21. The Divine nature of their leader is thus expressly declared; and the very fact that, here and elsewhere, he is spoken of as distinct from Jehovah, may sometimes sound strangely, as if he were inferior in nature; but can really be explained only by admitting that he is truly a partaker of the Divine nature.

Now in the very pleading of Moses wherein he desires not at all to go towards Canaan, if not under the care of a Divine person, we have the judgment of true wisdom, applicable not only to the guidance of Israel in the desert, but to the guidance of the race—or of any individual man in the great affair of religion. We need a Divine Guide; a

Divine Teacher; a Divine Redeemer; a Divine Intercessor; nothing less should content us; and any teachings that would substitute any inferior Lord are low and inadequate to the true wants of sinful and ignorant men.

It is indeed a solemn thing to reflect upon the Scriptural teachings upon this subject! For sinful men to know that the God with whom they have to do is not only of infinite justice and purity, but that he is the searcher of hearts and knows all our thoughts, may indeed excite the most lively emotions of fear. How can we bear the gaze of this holy and just One! How much must he ever be offended with our deficiencies and transgressions; and how terrible may his wrath at any time be? Even if we venture to pray for his forgiveness, how can we draw near to the foot-stool of infinite purity? The distance between us and this great and dreadful God, is too great; and we say with Israel to their leader, "Let not God speak to us, lest we die."

It is doubtless that they might not be brought into relations so close and awful with a just and holy God that men have sought for themselves other and intermediate intercessors, more nearly like themselves. They suppose that interceding saints can approach God as sinful men cannot; nor does the idolatrous church of Rome hesitate to ascribe attributes of mercy to the Virgin Mary that would lead men to choose her as rich in

mercy even above Christ. The blasphemies of St. Ligori's "Glories of Mary" upon this especial point are of the most daring and revolting character; and yet, as we have said before upon these pages, this volume has been republished in New York city, (1852,) under the auspices and with a commendatory preface from the late Archbishop Hughes. And the whole system of inferior mediators is based upon the great distance which sin makes between a holy God and his unworthy worshippers. And this may have been originally the starting place of idolatry.

And yet all this is to misconceive utterly the necessities of man and the mercies of God! It may be granted that it is a serious thing for a sinner to draw near a holy God: a fearful thing to sin with the eye of the Holy One upon us. But these sins, which he sees, are sins from which we need to be set free. We need pardon from their guilt; we need restraint from their commission; we need release from their power; we need cleansing from their pollution. Whatever tends best to secure these things we should desire. And if pardon and cleansing must come forth from God, why should we, who need these, shrink from laying open before his eye the full extent of our wants? Why should we, who desire restraints from sin as perfect as possible, wish to withdraw from his presence? It may be the natural dictate of a sinful heart to wish a separation from so high and holy a Guide: but

true wisdom may teach us that we can rely only upon a Divine and Infinite Leader.

Moses felt that the great duty of guiding and protecting Israel through the wilderness, and of leading them to Canaan, was much too heavy for any created power. How could any being, less than God himself, know all the perils and all the wants of that multitude; and defend them from evil and provide for them against want? Who less than God himself could spread their morning table upon the desert sands with manna for every household? Who less, could give them drink in these pathless wilds? Who could give victory to the tribes of Israel, so long in bondage and unaccustomed to warfare, when they came into conflict with the fierce and giant races of Palestine? And by whom, if not by him, could the rude passions and wayward rebellions of Israel be kept from bringing destruction upon themselves? Surely it was but to try the people, that now Jehovah proposed to leave the camp of Israel, and to place the multitude under the guardianship of an inferior protector.

The prayer of Moses suggests to us that there are things which no created agency can accomplish; which therefore God himself cannot intrust to the services of his creatures, however exalted; and which must be the immediate work of his own hands. Such a work is *creation*. That man even, can combine material things as furnished to his

hands into wonderful forms, we know. But it surpasses the power of man or angel to bring anything whatever into existence. It is little matter of what we speak. It is beyond the power of man, we know, to create a sun or a planet, or a tiny bird, or a lowly flower; it is an equal impossibility that he should create a grain of sand. It is beyond the power of man to work such miracles as attest the mission of God's messengers. He can pretend to the power; he can impose upon the credulity and ignorance of his fellows; he can do wonderful things which philosophy fails to explain. But in the open sight of the world, and by a word of power to heal the sick, to give sight to the blind, to restore the dead to life is beyond man's power. If these things were done by prophets and apostles, yet in every single act they openly confessed that the power was divine; and that neither their ability nor holiness could do such things; and thus every such wonder takes its place as an attestation of God's own agency. And utterly beyond the wisdom or the strength of any being, short of the mighty God, is that providential care which the universe constantly needs for its support, control and guidance. We are unable to conceive how the world can be governed—matter and mind making up one great universe—by the order of any laws working their own results uncared for by Infinite Wisdom. That the Infinite Mind should be consistent with itself, and therefore work by laws of

wonderful uniformity, we may reasonably believe; but that even the meanest things of the providential world can go forward without the direct and constant agency of God, we cannot believe. No one department of the great and continual work can the Almighty depute to the care of the noblest of his creatures. The tender blade of grass needs his care; and no living thing can move and have its being, but in him. Let us not measure him by our thoughts, or judge that the Everlasting God, Jehovah, the Creator of the ends of the earth, ever fainteth or is weary. Isa. xl. 28. With infinite ease he creates and cares for those things which finite capacities cannot comprehend, much less sustain and control. What a miserable world this would be governed by any less than God. It seems a great thought that God should be in everything; that he numbers the very hairs of our heads; that he watches the little sparrow. But we cannot afford to do without him. No wise man would wish to dwell in a world which God had given over to human hands; but our prayer would be that of Moses, "If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up."

And there is a greater thing than his providential government which God cannot entrust to any creature. It is revealed in the sacred Scriptures that the salvation of sinning man is wrought out by the eternal Son of God. And the more fully we ponder the great things involved in man's sal-

vation, the more clearly may we see that this is a work that can be committed to no created agency; but must be accomplished by a Divine Person. “When pressed down by guilt and languishing for happiness, I look around for a deliverer such as my conscience and my heart and the word of God assure me I need, insult not my agony, by directing me to a creature—to a man, a mere man, like myself. A creature! a man! My Redeemer owns my *person!* My immortal spirit is his property. When I come to die, I must commit it into his hands. My soul! my infinitely precious soul committed to a mere man! become the property of (any creature!) I would not thus intrust my *body* to the highest angel who burns in the temple above.”* Can any being short of the eternal Son of God stand between the innumerable hosts of redeemed men and the wrath of God due to their sins; can any less than a Divine person “bear our sins in his own body on the tree;” could any less rise from the dead for our justification; can any less stand in a ceaseless and prevailing intercession for us at the right hand of Eternal Majesty? The redemption of man in all its parts, is such a work as cannot be done by any substitution for the Divine attributes, which man’s Saviour must needs possess; and we say in the spirit of Moses, If we have not a Divine Redeemer, we can have NONE.

It would be an easy thing to apply this principle

* Dr. J. M. Mason’s Works, iii. 245-6.

still further to all matters pertaining to the course of piety. If the Israelites, delivered by a Divine Person from Egypt, could not still go through the wilderness with any inferior conductor, so does yet the church of God, so does every individual believer need the constant guidance of the same Divinity through every step of our pilgrimage. Tell the church any day that her God has withdrawn, and that an angel has become her guard and guide; and well may her people put off their ornaments, and her leaders cry, If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up.

The doctrine of a Divine Person, as the Redeemer and the Guide, the Teacher and the Protector of the church of God and of every member, is essential to the very existence, as well as the comfort of piety. We cannot now delay longer to develope the thoughts that belong to it; but these may suffice for our present purposes. Let us hold fast by the truth that Christ Jesus, a Divine Redeemer, was with the church in the wilderness, and is with his people now. He is the same, yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. Heb. xiii. 8. We must beware that we sin not against one of so great dignity, and now so clearly revealed. Heb. ii. 3; xii. 25. But we need just such a Saviour; just such a Guide; just such a Supporter and Protector; and we should be content with one of no less dignity. In our perplexities and apprehensions and anxieties, we need a Divine Friend to relieve and deliver

and counsel. In our sorrows we want a sympathy that man cannot give. And when heart and flesh fail, we wish the rod and staff of our Divine Shepherd, Ps. xxiii. 4, in the dark valley of Jordan. And beyond the darkness, in the land of eternal light, we wish to join the praises of our Redeemer with the name of Him who sits upon the throne. In the great affair of our salvation GOD IS ALL IN ALL; and our prayer is that of Moses, If thy presence go not, carry us not up.

CHAPTER XIII.

NADAB AND ABIHU.

WHILE the Israelites remained at the foot of Sinai, they completed the building of the tabernacle; and they were ready to set it up, upon the first day of the first month; less than a year after their leaving Egypt. We do not design any description of the tabernacle; nor of its services; nor of their significance in Divine worship. Suffice it to make a brief notice of a few matters. The tabernacle itself seems to have been built exclusively from the free-will offerings of the people. And it is greatly to their credit that offerings were so liberally brought that their rulers were obliged to tell them, it is enough. The duty of benevolence can never be exercised in its most profitable form, unless it is spontaneous. It is both a duty and a privilege. No grace is better fitted to enlarge the heart; none is more an imitation of God himself, who in a just sense is the only giver; none affords more true enjoyment to the cheerful and liberal heart, than the grace and duty of giving.

It is evident from the costly materials of this

sanctuary and the excellent work put upon it, that the Israelites left Egypt in possession of considerable wealth, and that they had skilful workmen among them. Two of these are mentioned by name. Bezaleel of the tribe of Judah, and Aholiab of the tribe of Dan; but many other skilful men wrought under their direction. There were workers in wood, in metals and in leather; in gems, in cloth, in embroidery; cuttings, and castings, and engravings.

When the tabernacle was set up on the first day of the second year in the desert, Moses consecrated Aaron and his sons to the priesthood; and established from that time forward the regular sacrifices in Israel, that were never to be remitted, at least until the end of that economy. Then the acceptance of the sanctuary and of the worship was signified by the descent of fire from God to kindle the altar. This perhaps was the method by which God signified his acceptance of Abel's offering: thus we know he answered Solomon at the dedication of the temple, 2 Chron. vii. 1; thus Elijah upon Mount Carmel. 1 Kings xviii. 38. It was the law of God to Israel that this fire should ever be kept burning upon the altar and never go out. We can hardly suppose that during the times of Israelitish idolatry and apostasy it never did go out: yet the law required them to keep it up. Similar are the practices of the Persian fire-worshippers, and the requirements made by the Romans of the priestesses

of Vesta. Plutarch says that Numa established the order of the Vestal virgins, whose chief or sole duty it was to guard the sacred fire. So also the Greeks had a sacred inextinguishable fire at Delphi. If these fires were ever extinguished, an import of public calamity, they could only be rekindled by securing a pure flame from the beams of the sun. It is impossible to decide whether these practices among the Gentiles have their origin elsewhere, or in this injunction to Israel. In regard to the fire upon the altar of Jehovah, the Jewish legends say that it was kept up until the Babylonish captivity; and there is a tale in 2 Macc. i. 19–22, about its preservation in a pit, where it turned to thick water, but was revived and recovered in the days of Nehemiah. But the renewal of it in the temple, 2 Chron. vii. 1, seems to show that it had *then* been lost; and even if preserved in Solomon's temple until *its* destruction, the Talmuds and many rabbis reckon the sacred fire as one of the five things which were absent from the second temple. As an extraordinary token of his presence in the tabernacle, the cloud so filled it that Moses was not able to enter in. So at the dedication of Solomon's temple, “the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord.” 1 Kings viii. 11. God's presence was often afterwards granted as truly, and his mercy shown as largely in both tabernacle and temple; but it was

fitting that the inauguration of a new era in Divine worship, should be marked by special proofs of his presence.

The order of events is not given us in these transactions. In reading the last chapter of Exodus we are not able to decide whether the things there done by Moses, were done by his own hands, or under his direction merely. Everything was done exactly "as the Lord commanded Moses;" an expression so important that it receives a seven-fold repetition in the course of that single chapter. It may be understood that Moses had an extraordinary commission to inaugurate the Levitical worship; and that therefore he performed services which afterwards pertained exclusively to the priesthood.

Archbishop Usher supposes that the entire book of Leviticus, in which we have very few historical incidents, occupies the space of a single month, directly succeeding the setting up of the tabernacle. Yet possibly part of this same time is occupied by the closing chapter of Exodus; and the consecration of Aaron and his sons is there more briefly recorded. v. 31. We hear here first of any regular service for ordination to the priesthood. Sacrifices had long been offered; the priesthood, in the case of Melchizedek, was long before recognized; but here is the first ordination to the office expressly recorded.

Shortly after the solemn consecration of Aaron

and his sons to the priesthood, an event occurred calculated to strike terror into the entire people. Nadab and Abihu, two of Aaron's sons, took their censers in their hands, and approached the tabernacle in the services of worship. But instead of kindling the incense from the sacred fire, which God himself had sent down to burn upon his own altar; and which they were enjoined to keep with such sacred care, they took ordinary fire for this sacred purpose. This presumptuous and guilty conduct was immediately fatal to them. The wrath of an offended God smote them both dead, at the very foot of the altar. But though it is said that the fire devoured them;* it seems evident that no external injury was done them. We know that a stroke of lightning often destroys life without any visible effect upon the person, or the clothes of the victim. As we are told that these priests were carried forth from the camp "in their coats," it would appear as if the injury was not external. Perhaps retaining every appearance of life and health, they were smitten down. Yet it may be, the flashing, angry fire was so seen, that their death was immediately known, and its cause.

It could be no trivial crime that was thus punished by the death of the priests so recently anointed to their solemn duties. No apology can be made for them that, being newly inducted, they

* The same word is used when the sword is said to *devour*. Deut. xxxii. 42; 2 Sam. ii. 26, &c.

had not yet learned the routine of their office; for this thing was plain enough to any apprehension. Since God had kindled that sacred fire by such extraordinary means, it was a duty and a privilege to kindle their censers only there. But when we read the solemn Divine injunction that immediately followed this judgment upon the sons of Aaron, we can scarcely doubt to what influence we are to ascribe their sin and their death. Nadab and Abihu were drunk with wine, when they stood before God with unhallowed fire. So the command to the priests of all time subsequent, is at once set forth: "Do not drink wine, nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die." Levit. x. 9.

The use of wine, and indeed drunkenness from its use, date back, we all know, even until the flood. And as we look back over these long tracts of history, what gloomy scenes have appeared in the dwellings of man by the influence of intoxicating drinks. That seems a strange perverseness of our nature that bids man, in every land and in every age, still maintain the use of beverages, that so madden the reason, so destroy the morals, so wreck the body, so produce in society misery and beggary and death. And what an example is here set before us in the case of these sons of Aaron. It may possibly be, that they had formed this destructive habit long before, in Egypt. Objectors have quoted Herodotus as declaring that the Egyp-

tians have no vines;* but Herodotus himself elsewhere mentions dried grapes among the Egyptian products; and abundant proofs of vines, wines, and drinking, can be gathered from the monuments that are still evidences of their ancient pastimes. We do not know the ages of Nadab and Abihu at this time; but their father was now eighty-four, Ex. vii. 7; and we cannot call them young men. Yet we are loth to believe that these, who had so lately been introduced into the priesthood, were already addicted to habits of intoxication.

But what kind of safeguard can be used against an evil like this, if men of their standing and of their character are cast down by it? Here are men of an age sufficiently advanced to free them from the impulsive promptings which are so often abused to the ruin of a generous and spirited young man. And these men, but a little while ago, were permitted to go up with the elders of Israel and to see their God in the revelations of Sinai. And now they are called to exercise the priesthood; and to draw near to the tabernacle in intercessions for the people. If such men fall, how can any be safe? We do not venture to say, with the sacred records in our hands, that total abstinence from wine and from all that intoxicates is rendered absolutely imperative by the Divine law. We do not presume to deny that these things may be valuable

* ii. 77. See note in Rawlinson's Herodotus and Hengstenberg's Egypt, &c., 12, seq.

remedial agents under the direction of skilful physicians. Indeed having direct authority, from higher than human wisdom, we enjoin the use of wine in the most sacred services of our earthly worship; an unanswerable proof that the use of wine is not absolutely prohibited. But the Divine injunction to operate as a preventive of the presumptuous sins of Nadab and Abihu is the entire disuse of the dangerous foe. If it must be allowed that the social use of wine finds recognition in the sacred Scriptures; yet there is no *command* for any such use; there are many earnest serious warnings of the dangerous evils that grow out of it; and there are many reasons of expediency that may lead us to adopt the total abstinence principle. No man can seriously allege that any one who totally refuses all countenance to these social usages, either puts in peril his own character, or the welfare of others.

But especially in view of the immense evils that have developed themselves in these later times through the use of intoxicating drinks, we may well urge the importance of their entire disuse as a social beverage. It seems almost as if all that can be said on this subject is said in vain; for the evil swells over our land, in a deluge whose copious fountains will not be dried up. There is nearly as much need of effort and watchfulness now as ever, after a generation of strenuous labour to save our children from the curse of drunkenness. Our

young men are ruined by thousands every year; our senate chambers are full of riot, and scenes which only the maddening bowl could produce; *delirium tremens* hurries away the rich, the honoured, the vigorous, though obituaries name some other disease; and the marriage feast and the hospitable gathering still offer among us that cup, which at the last “biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder.” Prov. xxiii. 32. Men may argue as they will of their freedom upon this subject, and even of Scriptural toleration. But I violate no law by the resolute, immovable resolve that I can have no part in those social practices, by which so many have been ruined for this world and the next. If I am left at liberty to use or not use, I can easily choose my position. I would say with Paul, “If meat make my brother to offend I will eat no meat while the world stands.” And the position which this question has assumed in our modern society, throws a heavy weight of responsibility upon all those who stand back from the efforts that are necessary to resist the encroachments of that system of evils, which lies couched under the single term of “strong drink.”

CHAPTER XIV.

AARON'S RESIGNATION UNDER AFFLICION; THE BLASPHEMY OF SHELOMITH'S SON.

"We will be patient and assuage the feeling
 We cannot wholly stay ;
By silence sanctifying, not concealing
 The grief that must have way." LONGFELLOW.

THE judgment upon Nadab and Abihu may teach us that a crime committed under the influence of strong drink, is not to be thought lightly of, for any such reason. The guilt of a deliberate drunkenness aggravates the iniquity that is committed, when a man has voluntarily put himself in such a state. Especially that these ministers of God's altar should venture to indulge in intoxicating drink, just before entering on the discharge of sacred duties, does but render more flagrant their presumptuous sin in the offering of strange fire.

Doubtless the immediate severity of their punishment was partly owing to the fact that now the solemn services of the Levitical dispensation were first set up; and it seemed needful to impress the people with a just sense of the majesty and terror of Jehovah. So when David would re-establish

the worship of God before the ark, the death of Uzzah reminded the people that Jehovah must be duly worshipped. 2 Sam. vi. 7. So Ananias and Sapphira died for their presumptuous sin against the Holy Ghost. Acts v. 5, 10. At the beginning, it seemed needful to impress upon the people the serious nature of their worship, and the awe and reverence with which they should approach God. And the Divine forbearance in later days is no proof that sins as serious as the sins of these priests are not committed in the sight of God, and even in his sanctuary. Men may keep back part of the price and say before men what is not true before God, like Ananias; men may put forth their hands in unacceptable service to sustain the tottering ark, like Uzzah; men may come into the sanctuary, like Nadab and Abihu, and instead of kindling the incense they offer at the altar of God to burn in holy love, in intelligent zeal, in humble faith, and in the bruised and precious frankincense of a penitent heart, they come with the strange fire of human passion and prejudice and selfishness; and these things may, in even more serious forms, reproduce the sin of the sons of Aaron. The God we worship is a gracious God; but woe to the presumptuous sinner who holds fast his iniquities while approaching him. In all ages he abhors iniquity and worship together. Isa. i. 13. He ever says to his worshippers, “Cleanse your hands and compass mine altar.” Nor is the sin of later ages less

odious before him, that he delays to smite. So Moses explains this scene to Aaron. "This is that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified." Lev. x. 3.

There is scarcely any scene in the life of Aaron that better exhibits the true piety of his character than this. Only a little while ago we had good reason to censure the elder brother of Moses, that he so easily yielded to the demands of the people, and made for them the golden calf. Perhaps his penitence for that sin has prepared him to bear the heavy trial now laid upon him. We are never so well prepared for the heaviest and most unexpected afflictions, as when we are in a humble and penitent frame. Perhaps the awful death of the priests took place before the agonized eyes of their aged father: and too well, even without the words of Moses, could he take in at one glance the overwhelming catastrophe. Death in the household is a stunning stroke when it falls most lightly, and long looked for, and upon one; but sudden death, upon two manly sons, whose support and comfort in his declining years the aged Aaron had so long anticipated, by the direct hand of God, and for their sins, and with no space for penitence; what pious mind can estimate the crushing weight of such a fearful stroke! And as the father and the two remaining sons were themselves engaged at the time in their priestly duties and dressed in

their priestly robes, it was not lawful for them to give expression to their grief in the usual signs of mourning. They dare not touch the dead bodies of their beloved ones; nor cover their heads; nor rend their garments. In a calamity, as heavy as we can well conceive, they must remember whence the stroke had come, and bow submissively before God. The rest of the congregation were permitted to mourn upon an occasion like this; but the priests must not forget their public duty then pressing, to indulge their private sorrow.

How much meaning therefore is included in the brief expression, "And Aaron held his peace." And indeed silence under the hand of God is often our best course. "I was dumb" says the Psalmist. xxxix. 9. "I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." Hard, as it sometimes is, to feel truly submissive, yet we ought to reflect that any other feeling is murmuring against God. And if there is nothing else to sustain us in our griefs, this should be enough, that they are from his hand. Neither a strange, nor a chance thing has happened to us. Infinite wisdom and righteousness are the sure guarantee of all he does. Yet true submission and resignation, so far from implying that we are to have no griefs, or be ourselves unfeeling under them, are only possible, when we do feel; and are only the more honouring to God, when the heaviest stroke calls forth no murmur. True piety, so far from destroying the affections and attach-

ments of social life, makes them more tender and binding. We cannot see the evils that come upon those we love, especially when we know how ill they are prepared to meet them, without the deepest anguish. And if it be true that our usual afflictions are lighter than this trouble in the family of Aaron, we should find in this some solace. But the final refuge is in the name and character of that holy God, who in his darkest dealings still "doeth all things well." Perhaps we may reflect that it is a common thing with the sacred writers to present us with such examples of grace as may best animate us to glorify God. They seem eminent examples, but their very excellence leaves us without apology for the neglect of easier duties. If we see Aaron and Eli and Job bearing with so much patience and resignation the evils that fall upon them, are our trials so much harder as to justify us in murmuring? Rather, if they could glorify God in their trials, much more should we in all he sends upon us.

Another event which happened not long after the death of these priests, is recorded in the book of Leviticus, xxiv. 11-23; and doubtless was designed to impress the people with a solemn reverence for the name of the Lord. Two men were quarrelling in the camp, and one of them used the name of the Lord in cursing and blasphemy. It is expressly mentioned that this man was of a mixed descent; as if the sacred writer would call our at-

tention to the danger that may attend the religious education of children, when both parents do not unite to impress the same lessons of a holy faith. And surely every thoughtful mind must acknowledge that there are temptations enough surrounding our families, and dangers enough that they may go astray, even when the most careful and joint efforts and prayers of a pious parentage are used for their training. The parental work is one where we can afford to lose no advantage we can possibly secure; to spare no effort we can put forth; to substitute no mere name of piety for the warmest spirit of it. Much depends, for the moral character of the children, upon the real piety of the parents. Especially piety in the young is greatly influenced by parental piety. Many do indeed object to this, that they often see the children of pious families irreligious and even flagrantly wicked; and their inference is that family training is of no considerable value. But even if the alleged facts were entirely true, this is the reasoning of short-sighted folly. The force of the argument lies just in the opposite direction.

Look around you! You see many children of piety, many, whose parents on both sides are Israelites, wander far from God and duty. But until you find the children of irreligious parents just as likely as any others to serve and fear God, you have not disproved the immense importance of a religious education. We may acknowledge that in

this world of sin and temptation, all the efforts of godly parents cannot prevent many children of piety from straying into paths of evil: yet it is no legitimate inference that therefore all effort is useless. Rather, we should exert ourselves the more earnestly. The natural tendency of an irreligious training is irreligion: we scarcely expect to see the children of such households brought to fear God: and those who do care for the morals and the souls of their children, must discharge their parental obligations with unceasing fidelity, both in precept and in prayer. Alas that it must be confessed, that parental delinquency, even in those who profess better and know better, is the true solution of the inquiry, concerning many a ruined child. Blame not the parental professions but the parental inconsistencies. The son of Shelomith blasphemed and cursed the name of Jehovah. From this passage the Jewish rabbins have taught that it is unlawful to pronounce that holy name. But his sin consisted, not in the use of the name; but in cursing and blasphemy. The bystanders were shocked at the crime; inquiry was made as to the will of the Lord in the case; and by the Divine direction the blasphemer was stoned to death. The witnesses must lay their hands upon his head, in token that they were not partakers of a sin which, as much as any social vice, seems infectious; and the entire congregation, as all interested in

putting away such a sin from among them, must join in casting stones upon him.

And if in our age and in our land the guilt of blaspheming the name of God is not visited by the death of the offender, it is not because his iniquity is any less. It is indeed hard to point out any iniquity more truly flagrant before God: and every element of aggravation belongs to it. The sin of blasphemy is a sin *against the very highest authority*, even that of God himself. It is a sin *without motive, without real advantage, without gratification*. No man makes himself richer, wiser, or happier by it: no man raises himself to a higher standing in society; but when he is most proficient in it, he only makes himself the more fitting companion for the vilest wretches. It is always a *social sin*. No man ever learned profanity except by hearing others; no man ever practised profanity except that others might hear him: and the wretched influence spreads around like a contagion. It makes the matter only the worse that this is a *common vice*. We think less of familiar evils; but they are no less. Sodom would have been spared, if the sinfulness of the city had been less universal. The daring wickedness of profanity, as solely against God: its unprovoked nature, as of no advantage to the sinner: its miserable influence to spread so widely abroad in society: and its awful madness in calling expressly down the damning curse of God upon the souls of men, mark this

crime in all its various degrees as one of very great enormity.

Let no man who indulges in profane expressions congratulate himself that the penalty of death for this crime is not put upon the statute books of our governments. He cannot escape the just judgment of God. Scarcely anything is more serious than to know that the punishment due to the violation of one commandment of his holy law, God intrusts to no one, but reserves for himself alone. When this man blasphemed in the wilderness the people stood amazed at the crime, but according to the tenor of the third commandment, they must ask God what to do with him. And though we do not understand that vulgar profanity is the only way by which men break that third precept: though many a man fails to reverence the names, titles, ordinances, word and works of God, besides the ribald blasphemer; yet hardly any sentence in the Bible is more awful than that which respects this class of sins, "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." And this sentence is none the less solemn, if we notice that though there is a mingled warning and promise in the second precept, this commandment against profanity contains the only pure threatening expressed in the Decalogue. Let not that man think his guilt is light, or his escape possible, of whom God himself declares "I WILL NOT HOLD HIM GUILTY."

CHAPTER XV.

*THE PROVOCATION. I.**MERIBAH AND THE SIN OF MOSES.*

THERE is impressive instruction in the fact that the time spent by the children of Israel in the wilderness is emphatically termed in the Scriptures, (Ps. xcv. 8; Heb. iii.) "THE PROVOCATION." Their rebellions, especially as contrasted with the wonderful displays of the Divine power and grace, were remarkable even in the annals of human depravity. Yet they are valuable records to us; and they are written for our learning, because the tendencies of fallen man are the same in all ages. Well may we fear the indulgence of murmuring and rebellious feelings when we see them so provoke God, and issue in judgments like these upon Israel. No generation of men had such reasons as they for faith and obedience. Descended from the patriarchs, whom God had separated from the degenerating nations that they might keep his truth and hold his promises, even in the bondage of Egypt they had been sustained by hopes of a great deliverance. They had been oppressed there, yet

not in hopeless slavery; but as pilgrims who were soon to leave the land in triumph. The solemn covenant they themselves had made over the bones of Joseph was a constant memorial of their going forth from Egypt; and their years of bondage were not spent without occasional tokens of coming freedom. The early history of Moses doubtless had its effect to cheer the days of darkness. The faith of such parents could not be wholly lost upon their generation: and the remarkable preservation and education of the child; and the bold stand he took, "when he was come to years," Heb. xi. 24, to cast in his lot with his down-trodden race, were gleams of light to encourage many a believing heart in Israel.

But the dawn of glory to Israel was at the return of this noble exile. What a favoured time when this great prophet showed the credentials of his Divine commission. Many a believing Israelite who had longed to see that day, had closed his anxious eyes, and laid his dust in the oppressor's soil. Doubtless that believing mother who had watched with faith so strong, the early days of Moses, had placed him by the margin of the Nile, and had joyfully received him back to train up for Israel's God, had her faith strengthened by Jehovah's answering mercies, and by the dawning virtues of her noble boy. Perhaps this believing Jochebed, (Ex. vi. 20,) had been spared by a kind Providence to see the day when her son fulfilled

her prayers and answered her faith, by leaving the daughter of Pharaoh, and the pleasures and the gods of Egypt, to come back to his mother's side, to share the afflictions of her people, and to adopt their faith! But it is not likely that she lived to see his return from exile, or to share his triumphs over Pharaoh. Egypt was the grave of many who had believingly waited for the salvation of Jehovah.

But after such promises and preparations, Israel should have been ready for a firm and confident trust in their covenant God. Certainly when Moses came again among them, so qualified to be their leader, by gifts natural and acquired, by the grace that made him an Israelite indeed, and by those wondrous powers which attested a Divine commission, the people had just reason to banish every fear, to obey every direction and to trust, in the darkest perplexities, the kindness and power of the God who had done so great things for them. Especially after they had really left Egypt, they should have buried every doubt and every murmur in the coral depths of that returning sea. Every weakness was succeeded by new strength; every grief was followed by new joy; every perplexity displayed new grace in God; and saved by the opening waters of the sea, and fed by daily bread from heaven, and guided by the cloud of God's presence, and taught by his voice on Sinai, and spared by his mercy in the day of their idolatry,

this people should surely have feared no want, turned aside from no danger, and murmured at no trial, under the care and protection and guidance of their covenant God.

But this favoured generation did not serve God according to the benefits bestowed upon them. Not only is their sojourn in the desert "the day of temptation," but they are reproached with having provoked God "ten times." Numb. xiv. 22. This is perhaps a definite, used for an indefinite number; though there are some who contend that the exact number of the provocations can be reckoned in the Scriptures.* Without attempting either to enumerate or describe these occasions in detail, we may briefly speak of a few of these instances of rebellion at different periods of their history.†

The Israelites tempted God. Not by provoking him to evil, for of this, he is incapable. James i. 13. But when they distrusted his care so often exercised, his promises so often repeated, and his grace so largely shown: or when they were discontented in spite of favours already granted; or when they put his power and grace to an unnecessary test, they were guilty of tempting God.

The provocations of the Israelites may be clas-

* *Bush in loco.*

† Ten is used as an indefinite number in Gen. xxxi. 7, Job xix. 3, and Lev. xxvi. 26. *Ranke* cites ten exact passages thus: [1] Ex. v. 20, 21: [2] xv. 22-7: [3] xiv. 11, 12: [4] xvi. 2, 3: [5] xvi. 20: [6] xvii. 1-7: [7] xxxii. 8: [8] Num. xi. 1-4: [9] xi. 4-35: [10] xiv.—*Kurtz's Old Covenant*, iii. 287.

sified as to their several occasions. The first class of provocations arose from their natural necessities in passing through the desert.

Food and water for an entire nation through such a sterile district, would be prime necessities. And as that land afforded no natural means of supply, we scarcely wonder at their distress upon the slightest threatening that these might fall short. To desire these, and to pray God for their bestowment, would be their duty: and doubtless the God who had led them into that dry land would have healed the bitter waters of Marah, and would have opened the gushing rock, if his brief delay to try their spirit, had met an answering faith upon their part. Having before spoken of the rock that supplied their thirst, we will now say little of the three occasions upon which the people murmured for water. At Marah, Moses healed the bitter waters; at Massah, he brought water from the rock during their first year in the desert: and we have already considered this. Now at Meribah, many years afterwards, he again brought water from the rock. Upon this occasion, Moses and Aaron fell under the Divine displeasure: and the Lord declared that they both should die in the desert.

Moses greatly longed to see the promised land: but having shown so great mercy in hearing his prayers on behalf of his people, God would not hear this personal request, slight as it seemed to be. Great perplexity has existed, to know the

exact matter of transgression in Moses. Calvin thinks that even Moses was unbelieving upon this occasion, because "he rather considered what the people deserved" than the power of God; and indeed the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Ye believed me not, to sanctify me." Num. xx. 12. Others judge that he ought not to have smitten the rock twice; others that he should not have struck the rock at all, since he was but bidden to speak to it. The truth is, that Moses was vexed and impatient; and gave vent to the impulses of his over-chafed spirit in a manner that did not become the prophet of God. So the Psalmist, (cvi. 32, 33,) explains this matter. "They provoked his spirit so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips." There may be different elements in the same sin. The angry words of the lawgiver: perhaps his presumptuous claim, "must WE fetch you water;" and the rising doubt of the Divine answer, make up this offence. This is a solemn lesson to teach us that God will permit no man to encroach on his prerogatives. Even the long and eminent and faithful services of Moses cannot excuse this single fault. His sin is the more marked that God had shown him so many favours. In the light of this transaction, no sin against God is trivial; no moment of temptation is unimportant; and we should ever fervently pray, "Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins."

But not only the need of water but of food, led

to the provocations of the desert. After having been fed for a long time upon the manna, the Israelites began to murmur for the various food they had eaten in Egypt. They seem not to have murmured so long as they stayed at Sinai; but almost as soon as they began to go forward; Numb. x. 33: xi. 1; nor was this restrained by judgments from His hand. The chief complaints seem to have been among the loose multitude of the Egyptians who had come forth with Israel, Num. xi. 4: but the Israelites also were led to join in their rebellion. This was unreasonable, unthankful, and wicked conduct. They forgot Egypt's heavy yoke, in a foolish longing for the mere gratification of the appetite. So great was their murmuring, that Moses declared himself unable to bear the burden of so great a people. Let us find no fault with him for this; as the Scriptures find none. It was the necessary infirmity that belonged to a mediator merely human. "The *true* Mediator and perfect Head of the people of God had not yet come."* A greater than Moses—a greater than man, was alone able to stand in the breach between Israel and God, and be pre-eminently the "One Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all," 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6; and who voluntarily and with full foresight of all that it involved, "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Phil. ii. 8. For only

* Kurtz's History Old Covenant, ii. 265.

a Divine Person could take or fill the true mediationship.

Even the unreasonable demand for such food in the desert was given at their request. Moses himself regards it as strange that God could provide flesh; and supposes that their flocks must be slain. Yet he ought to have remembered that flocks of quails had supplied the camp with food, even before they came to Sinai. Ex. xvi. 13. On our continent we have been accustomed to see such enormous flocks of wild pigeons, passing to the number of millions in a single company, that we can scarcely be surprised at the ease with which these wants were supplied. Our great ornithologist, Audubon, says, that in the autumn of 1813, while journeying in Kentucky, he observed the pigeons flying in numbers greater than he had ever before seen. Feeling inclined to count the flocks within sight, "I dismounted and found that 163 flocks passed in twenty-one minutes. I travelled on, and still met more, the further I proceeded. The air was literally filled with pigeons, the light of noonday was obscured as by an eclipse, and the continued buzz of wings had a tendency to lull my senses to repose."*

He further says, that he passed through their roosting and breeding place, which was forty miles long and three miles wide; and of the scenes that there occurred he gives a stirring and remarkable

* Iconographic Encyclopedia, ii. 572.

description. He also estimates the numbers of these flocks, and the food they consumed; and supposes that there were 1,115,136,000 pigeons in one flock: and that the daily food of this immense multitude at the rate of half a pint for each pigeon, would be 8,712,000 bushels. And no one can question the competency of Audubon to testify on such a subject.* It is far less than the estimate of Wilson, another celebrated American ornithologist, who computes one flock at 2,230,272,000, and its daily consumption at 17,424,000 bushels. But they feed upon everything, acorns, beech nuts, chestnuts, grains and berries; they have great rapidity of flight; and their range is over vast uncultivated tracts of country; otherwise they must either be famished or cause a famine.† It is worthy of notice that by supposing three rather than two pigeons to the square yard, Wilson's estimates are exactly double those of Audubon; the one giving 180 miles in length to his parallelogram, and the other 240.

Quails are found throughout the whole eastern continent, and migrate in immense numbers.‡ Some have thought that locusts are meant: but this does not seem to agree with the Psalmist's words, lxxviii. 27, feathered, or winged fowl. These birds are said to have been two cubits

* See note in Wilson's American Ornithology, 394, 5.

† Wilson's Ornithology, 399.

‡ Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, art. *Quail*.

high upon the face of the earth. This can hardly mean that there was that depth of them, like a fall of snow; for the people could not have moved in the camp; it would have been contrary to Jewish law to eat the smothered birds that lay beneath, Lev. iii. 17; Deut. xii. 16; and they could not have avoided a pestilence. They may have been in heaps two cubits high. But perhaps it means that either from weariness, having recently crossed the Red Sea; or from the usual habit of this bird, they flew about that high from the ground. Our quails rather run than fly. Dr. Thomson says of the Syrian quail, "They hide under the bushes, and will not rise on the wing unless forced to do so by a dog or by the hunter."* These the Israelites gathered abundantly; and dried for subsequent use.

But while the food was yet in their mouths, the wrath of their offended God smote the murmuring people. We have in this a fearful warning that God may grant the desires of a rebellious heart: as we saw just now, in the case of Moses, that he may refuse the prayers of a penitent. That is an instructive sentence of the Psalmist, "And he gave them their request but sent leanness into their soul." cvi. 15. Man cannot distrust God, murmur at him, rebel against him, with impunity. And when we indulge no evil temper, when our prayers are consistent with true humility and pen-

* Land and Book, i. 310.

itence, so little can we judge what is best, that we should cheerfully refer every matter to him, to give or withhold in his wisdom. And every prayer may well close in the language of one, inexpressibly holier and wiser than we, “Nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt.” Mark xiv. 36.

CHAPTER XVI.

*THE PROVOCATION. II.**THE SPIES AND THE DESERT-WANDERINGS.*

A SECOND class of provocations against God may include the rebellions of the people against the Divine leadings in the wilderness.

The most remarkable of these resulted in turning back the entire nation, just as they were upon the borders of Canaan; and in the solemn oath of Jehovah that that unbelieving generation should not pass over Jordan, but should die in the wilderness.

As they drew near the promised land, they proposed to send forth suitable persons to survey and report the advantages and the dangers to which they were advancing. Doubtless this plan sprang from the fears of the people; and was not consistent with a firm dependence on the grace and power of God. But the Divine forbearance was exercised towards a people, who had seen so little war: and permission was given that this measure should be adopted. Compare Num. xiii. 1, and Deut. i. 22. Happy for the people if their unbelief had gone no further than this.

Twelve men, whose names are given, were sent forth upon this important business. They were all princes, of the very flower of the nation: perhaps in the vigour of life. Caleb, we know, was forty years old. It was a work requiring toil and judgment: and it could neither be laid upon the aged, nor intrusted to the young. After spending forty days,—perhaps in separate companies which met together at Eshcol,—in going through the land, they returned to the camp, bringing with them various fruits. Among these were some grapes, of an extraordinary size, it is generally thought. Yet their size is not directly mentioned; and it may rather have been to keep them from being bruised in a carriage of sixty miles, that they were borne upon a staff between two persons. Yet various travellers speak of grapes in Palestine, that grow in clusters weighing from ten to twelve pounds;* and Dr. Kitto mentions a bunch of grapes from a Syrian vine at Welbeck, the seat of the Duke of Portland, that in 1819 was sent as a present to the Marquis of Rockingham: it was 23 inches long by $19\frac{1}{2}$ through, weighed 19 pounds, and was carried twenty miles by four men, two by two.† Yet if we read “a branch, *even* a cluster,” it may refer to a number of branches hanging very

* “Nothing would be easier than to multiply testimonies relative to the large size of the grapes of Palestine.”—Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible, Art. VINE.

† Daily Biblical Illustrations, II. 167.

close together. Such a bunch of very remarkable size, I myself but recently saw, at an agricultural fair.

When the men returned to their people, they brought back a good report of the land and of its fruits. And we may suppose that these fruits would look quite tempting to a people who had now been deprived of the fruits of the earth for more than a year. But the majority of the men were disheartened at the dangers apparently before them. They do not seem to have spoken falsehood directly: for we afterwards read of walled cities, and of the giants there. But in the indulgence of a temper, unbelieving and greatly dishonouring towards God, they persuaded the people that they were not able to go up and possess the land. In vain did two of these men, Joshua and Caleb, attempt to withstand the tide of guilty feeling. Perhaps because Joshua, as the well known personal friend of Moses, might at this juncture have less influence for that reason, Caleb seems on this occasion to have been forward and earnest rather than Joshua. They both rent their garments in token of their great grief: and were so active to quell the tumult, that they endangered their lives. But they could avail nothing. The people wept; and plotted again a new captain and a return to Egypt.

Upon this occasion the Lord renewed to Moses his offer to destroy them, and to make of him a greater people. But again the man of God plead

in prevailing prayer for the rebellious tribes. But though the people were spared, they were not unpunished. The ten men who had brought back this evil report, died by a plague before the Lord: the people were sentenced to wander in the desert, one year for every day spent by the spies in searching the land: they were bidden to turn back the next day towards the Red Sea; and assured that all over twenty years of age at the exodus from Egypt, should die without seeing Canaan. As a special mark of approbation towards the two men who believed the word of the Lord, Caleb and Joshua were excepted from this sentence. They alone of all that generation were to enter Canaan. It is possible that the tribe of Levi were not included in this curse. That tribe was to have no separate inheritance: no man was sent from among the Levites to search the land; but the tribe of Joseph, being divided unto Ephraim and Manasseh, kept up the original number of twelve: and we read that Eleazar the son of Aaron was still alive after the conquest of Canaan. Josh. xiv. 1: xvii. 4. As the age for service in the priests is not specified, we cannot certainly decide that Eleazar was more than twenty when he left Egypt. But as the Levites were not numbered at all in the census taken of those over twenty years old, (See Num. i. 47-49, and xxvi. 62-65,) it is possible that that tribe had no share, either in this sin or in its punishment. Certainly Moses and Aaron do not seem

to have supposed themselves included in this sentence. They did not enter Canaan; but their exclusion was announced at a later time, and other reasons assigned for it.

As usual, the unbelieving people, under the fear of this judgment, rushed to the opposite extreme. A body of the Canaanites, who had perhaps heard of their threatened invasion and had come out to oppose them, had taken possession of a neighbouring hill-top; and even against the command of Moses the Israelites persisted to attack them. The same bravery the day before, might have met the Divine blessing; but now they had lost their true strength, and the battle issued in their utter defeat. After this, they turned back as the Lord commanded; and began the long wanderings of the desert. We may say only this of their journeyings for forty years that they shadow forth sufficiently, very much of the experience which meets us in the Christian life. Though they were turned back in the displeasure of God, he did not forsake them: and doubtless our earthly lives are various and checkered, if not lengthened, by the sinfulness from which we must be purged before we can enter the heavenly Canaan. And we may regard these sacred words as an epitome of our lives, as well as of theirs, "The Lord thy God led thee these forty years through the wilderness to humble thee and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or

no." Deut. viii. 2. He proves us. He calls us to trust his love and grace: he bids us keep his holy commands: he is worthy of our confidence: we never disbelieve but to our own confusion: we never trust him but to find him faithful.

Of another provocation of this same class we may speak again. Num. xxi. 4-9. But should we not remember that the apostle, expressly and at large, warns us against the same type of unbelief that is here shown in the Israelites. He says that a rest, more glorious and more enduring, remains for the people of God: he exhorts us to seek to enter in. See Heb. iii. iv. We are in danger of a like unbelief. Not a total unbelief in God's existence: not a rejection of God's prophets: not a total refusal to bow before his altars. We, like Israel in the desert, are the visible people of God. Not a man in all that camp could doubt the daily wonders of the Divine hand; or call in question the authority of the truths which Moses spake. Yet they did not rely upon the word of God, in disregard of the difficulties that seemed to forbid its fulfilment. They feared the Canaanites against whom he had bidden them contend. Theirs was that very type of speculative faith conjoined with practical unbelief, which is so common among us in men who say the Bible is true; and yet who believe not to the saving of the soul, in the Jesus it reveals.

And what an awful assurance is that which tells

us that against unbelievers now, the oath of God may be recorded, "They shall not enter into my rest," especially when this seems the fearful antithesis of God's recorded oath in favour of the believer. The apostle says that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, every believer is infallibly assured of his salvation. This he calls strong consolation to every one that flies to Jesus. Heb. vi. 17, 18. But it is equally true that the same two immutable things—the word and the oath of the God who cannot lie—give certain assurance, to every one that believes not, of his damnation. And now that the gospel comes to us in terms so plain, by authority so high, with sanctions so solemn, and offering mercies so large and abiding, well may those who hear it fear to incur the sin and curse of unbelief. And our choice lies between these wide and dreadful extremes, the two immutable things of God, his oath and his word, for, or against us; our blessing, or our curse.

CHAPTER XVII.

*THE PROVOCATION. III.**THE LEPROSY OF MIRIAM.*

A THIRD class of provocations shown by the people in this day of temptation consisted in murmurings and rebellions against the authority held by Moses as the servant of God.

The first instance of this involves the immediate relatives of Moses. His brother Aaron, and his sister Miriam are the transgressors. We should remember that they were both older than he. At least we have no record of any other sister than Miriam: she was doubtless the first-born of the family, and old enough to watch over the infant Moses in the bulrushes. Modern engravings have indeed represented Miriam as a young girl, dancing and singing in the triumph at the Red Sea: yet that was the holy rejoicing of a venerable matron, not less than ninety years of age! It may be that the disinterested spirit of Moses, who never sought honours for himself, never pushed his own children forward, never showed any favouritism towards his own relatives, may have been little relished by his

kinsmen, who desired to share his power and honours. Especially that the younger brother should be their superior, may have been galling to Miriam and Aaron. How sad a thing to see that at their age ambition is not yet dead, and wisdom not yet ripe.

The ostensible ground of complaint is that Moses had married an Ethiopian, or according to the original word, a Cushite woman. The word Cushite, rendered Ethiopian, is applied in the Scriptures, not only to dwellers in Africa, but also in Arabia, where some of the descendants of Cush may have settled. As we have no record of a second marriage on the part of Moses, Miriam and Aaron may have applied this term to Zipporah: and this, without exact justice. She may not have been a descendant of Cush: and yet that she dwelt in a land sometimes called by his name, was ground enough for a reproach from unfriendly lips. That Zipporah is the wife referred to, seems likely from a further examination of the case. For the true ground of complaint was a jealousy of the authority which Moses did not share with his own kindred, even by consulting them in matters of grave importance. The marriage of Moses had taken place many years before; but Miriam and Aaron had never seen his wife until a few months before this; and it was much the same to them as a new marriage. And when they saw this wife's relatives held in special esteem by Moses; and his father-

in-law even suggesting an important change for the government of the people, which Moses received favourably, and adopted, Ex. xviii. 13–24; and contrasted this with the fact that his own relatives had never been consulted, perhaps had been left out when seventy elders were chosen to relieve the cares of Moses, Num. xi. we may judge that jealousy of things they esteemed slight, may really have been their grievance touching the wife of their brother. What other connection can we see between their words and the introduction of this wife? “Hath the Lord spoken only by Moses? Hath he not spoken also by us?” The mention of Zipporah arose from their jealousy of the influence of her friends: and this was but a pretext to cover over their own ambitious aspirings.

All this was the more evil because Moses had given no just occasion of complaint. On the contrary he had always borne his honours meekly; and it is to his praise that he never made the least attempt to keep his great power within his own family, or to transmit it to his sons. Many critics have indeed supposed that the verse in which Moses speaks of his own meekness, Num. xii. 3, must have been inserted in his writings by some other pen. It must be acknowledged that the concluding verses of Deuteronomy were not written by Moses, since they record his death, and what happened after it; and we may safely say that no such changes as either of these would have been allowed

in the sacred records except from a competent, i. e. an inspired and authorized hand. Yet it is entirely consistent with true humility in Moses, that, though he is elsewhere so reserved in speaking of himself, and shows no disposition to egotism or self-praise, he should at such a time as this throw in one single sentence to vindicate his disinterestedness, and to challenge the proof that any man had ever thought less of self than he. So Paul vindicates himself, even blushing for shame that he must do so: thinking himself a fool in glorying: but protesting, "Ye have compelled me." 2 Cor. xii. 11. A man may be placed in circumstances where he is not only justified, but required by the interests of truth and righteousness, to speak what seems self-praise. When those who should commend, find gross fault with a man, and this to his very face, silence seems itself pleading guilty of the charge. Just this remark appears needful in this very place to vindicate Moses from the aspersions of Miriam and Aaron: and whether written by his pen or not, it speaks the simple truth.

But just because the lawgiver had been guilty of no self-seeking, the words of his kindred were really murmurings against God: and as such, they immediately met the Divine displeasure. The very truth that Miriam was a prophetess and Aaron a prophet, Ex. iv. 15, 16: xv. 20, and that they were called with Moses the leaders of the people, Ps. lxxvii. 20: Mic. vi. 4, did but make their am-

bitious aspirings the more inexcusable. God was greatly displeased with their interference with the Divine prerogative; for surely he had the right to choose whom he would, to rule Israel: and all the preëminence of Moses was solely due to the Divine favour. Therefore the three were immediately called into the tabernacle; and God himself rebuked Miriam and Aaron, commended the faithfulness of Moses, and declared that he stood before him, as no other servant ever did. Perhaps because of Aaron's official relations to the people, no punishment is declared against him. That he was the priest aggravated indeed his sin personally: but the people would have been greatly afflicted, if their most sacred representative should suffer as Miriam now did. It may be also because she was the chief offender, which the original language intimates more clearly than the English version,* judgment came upon her. Aaron looked upon Miriam and beheld she was leprous, as snow. There was no mistaking the token of Divine displeasure. It was not only a severe and loathsome disease; but a humiliating one—the most fitting one in all the Scriptures for a type of sin. We are not familiar with this disease: but, brought into Europe from the East after the downfall of the Roman Empire, it made frightful ravages upon that continent, prevailing in all for a thousand years, till the very

* Kurtz calls attention to the feminine form of the verb, Num. xii. 1, וְתִרְכָּה. History Old Covenant, iii. 275.

dawn of the Reformation; and to such an extent that thousands of hospitals and asylums were built to receive its victims.* The Jews regarded this malady as a Divine visitation; and, at least in its worst forms, as incurable except by Divine power. So there are no directions given for treating it by medicines; and the priests were made the judges of its existence and of its cure. Aaron here speaks of Miriam as one dead. Perhaps from the nature of the disease; perhaps from prejudices against it, derived from the Jewish regulations, a man in Europe who became a leper was treated like a dead man in the eye of the law; his marriage was dissolved, funeral services were held, even a shovel-full of earth cast upon his body, and masses said for the repose of his soul. No wonder Aaron met such a judgment as this, with an immediate submission. How ready now to ask the prayers of that brother of whom they had just complained. From Miriam's lips we hear nothing: possibly because she felt that a leper might not look up to God. Moses also, with characteristic generosity, lifted up his prayer that she might be healed.

And God graciously heard. Yet that they might not think too lightly of a pardon so readily granted, Miriam must be shut out of the camp for seven days. This may mean that she was obliged to comply with the requirements of the ceremonial law, which enjoined a seven days' separation even

* American Cyclopedias.

after they were healed. Lev. xiv. 8. Her punishment was public, for all the congregation stayed in their place till she was restored to them: and doubtless it was effectual. We hear no more of Miriam though she lived more than thirty years after this: and died just before the provocation at Meribah, when even Moses “spake unadvisedly with his lips.” Num. xx. 1: Ps. cvi. 33.

CHAPTER XVIII.

*THE PROVOCATION. III.**THE REBELLION AND FATE OF KORAH.*

IT seems surprising that the judgment upon Miriam did not stop another conspiracy against the civil and religious authority in the congregation. This was the most serious rebellion that occurred during all their stay in the wilderness. The chief leaders were Korah, who was a Levite, and Dathan, Abiram, and On, who were of the tribe of Reuben. But they had also succeeded in inducing two hundred and fifty princes of the congregation to join them in this matter. From the sacred narrative we may gather the reasons which led them to rebel. Prominent was their ambitious discontent with the existing rule. The Reubenites, grieved that their tribes had lost the rights of Jacob's first-born son, were envious that Moses should be the civil ruler: and Korah, ambitious of the priesthood, was jealous of Aaron.* And it may be, they were the more bold and discontented, because of the circumstances in which they then stood. Condemned to die in the desert and dis-

* Josephus Antiquities, lib. iv., c. ii., § 2.

heartened at the thought of spending forty years in those sterile wastes, they may have argued like desperate men; and have deemed it impossible that matters could be worse with them in any case. But the pretence by which they covered their designs was the plea that the whole congregation was holy: that they all had a right to the privileges which Moses and Aaron had usurped, or at least to a voice in choosing their civil and ecclesiastical rulers. Some suppose that Korah was descended from an older son of Levi, than Aaron was: and therefore he judged that upon any new settlement respecting the priesthood, it would naturally fall to his family and to him.

Like a prudent leader, the first effort of Moses was to expostulate with these men. He reasoned with Korah, not only claiming that the existing appointments were directly from Divine authority, and that it was folly in him to find fault with Aaron; but also showing that the Levites had good ground for gratitude in the distinction which the Divine arrangements had put upon them. His proposal to meet the Reubenites with conciliatory terms found in them no corresponding feeling: but they sent back a rude and peremptory refusal. They charged Moses with all the results that had flowed from the sins of the people; and then with assuming a despotic authority over them. They declared that they were not so blind but that they could see that he had not fulfilled his promise. He

had promised to bring them into a land flowing with milk and honey: and here they were surrounded by barren sands, with the prospect of spending their lives there. They knew well indeed that they themselves had refused to go forward to Canaan; and for their sins were doomed to remain in the desert. But it did not suit their purposes to avow this. It is common in rebellions, to take only a partial and one-sided view of the case: and those who are most in the wrong are usually most overbearing, most positive, and most irreconcilable.

Moses had before this been greatly distressed at this rebellion, knowing the aggravated character of their sin: and being desirous of saving them from its fearful consequences. But the obstinacy and injustice which they now showed, aroused his indignation, and proved that any attempt to reconcile them would be vain. For men who would see no guilt in their past rebellions, and who would charge guilt upon one that had never wronged them by the slightest exercise of oppression or injury, nothing remained but that they must meet the due reward of their iniquity. An appeal to the Divine decision was the only resource left: and Moses therefore summoned—rather perhaps challenged—them all to come before God upon the following day, to know the issue from him. Every man was to bring his censer and offer incense before God: and He himself would settle the controversy.

Doubtless Moses and Aaron were already aware, by Divine communication, of the means by which this daring and formidable rebellion was to be quelled. Well aware that God himself was rejected in a quarrel against those who bore credentials so clearly establishing their commission from him; knowing how justly Korah and his band deserved their fate; and acquiescing in this, as needful to vindicate rightful authority and to bring a salutary awe upon the people, they were yet desirous that the anger of Jehovah should fall upon as few as possible. It appears from the arrangement of the camp that the tribe of Reuben and the family of the Kohathites both had their place upon the south: Num. ii. 10: iii. 29: so that they were near neighbours of each other. So when the rebels came before God, two hundred and fifty princes took their censers; and Korah had gathered a great assembly with him, and many of them still stood in the doors of their own tents: so near did they usually dwell to the tabernacle. Num. xvi. 27. Then Moses and Aaron made intercession for them. First they were directed to separate themselves from all the congregation, and the Divine wrath should consume them all. But when they fell upon their faces and entreated that God would not lay upon the entire people a sin that belonged chiefly to one, or at most to the ring-leaders, their prayer was heard. They were then directed to bid the people save themselves by leaving that side of the camp which

was held in common by the rebels. Those therefore who sought to obey the command of God, which they had seen so terrible from the mouth of Moses so many times, departed from the tents of rebellion. It seems strange that the malcontents themselves could stand quietly at their own doors amidst these terrible preparations. But sin has fearful power indeed to blind the mind and sear the conscience: so that wicked men often die in their folly, with no sign either of fear or penitence.

That the judgment might make the greater impression, and be more indisputably the direct punishment of their iniquity, Moses declared beforehand what it should be. He publicly announced it as the decisive test that he was God's messenger, that these men should not die an ordinary death, but that, by a new and extraordinary visitation, the very earth should open beneath their feet and swallow them up. And even while he declared it, this great thing came to pass. The earth cleaved asunder, and Dathan and Abiram, with their tents, their families, and their goods, were swallowed up. A fearful shriek from the perishing households terrified the whole congregation; and as the case was not one for help, the awe-struck people fled from the spot lest the opening earth should swallow them also. The two hundred and fifty men who had censers had evidently come forward from the tents to present themselves directly before the taber-

nacle: and they perished yet more miserably. As their crime repeated that of Nadab and Abihu, so was their punishment like theirs. The fire of God smote them and consumed them. No death seems more fearful or terrible than that by fire: and fire directly from God is most awful.

Special directions were given concerning the censers which these unhappy men held in their hands when they perished. As if a sacred character belonged to anything that had been offered to God, even though the offering had not been acceptably made, the very materials of these censers were not to be used for common purposes. They were no longer to be used as censers; the sacred fire with which they had been kindled was to be scattered and suffered to die out; and of the brass, a covering was to be made for the altar. This was intended as a memorial-sign to warn the Israelites against the sin of these men: that no man might presume to the office of the priesthood except with a Divine call. The exact difference between the sin of Nadab and Abihu and that of Korah and his company, is easily noted. In the one case the proper priests offered forbidden fire: and in the other forbidden persons offered proper fire.

We cannot decide how many persons died at this time; but it is remarkable that we have afterwards express notice that the children of Korah did not perish in this judgment. Num. xxvi. 11.

A visitation so remarkable and appalling, and so

evidently from the hand of God, should have repressed all murmuring and rebellion in Israel. But in times of great public excitement, the minds of men are easily swayed towards the extremes; and no one knows what judgment to form of the state of things around him. Very evidently the terror of the Israelites had respect to the judgment of God, and not to the sin that called it forth. So they had no sooner recovered a little from the panic, than they resumed the state of mind they had before; and now assuming, just as Korah had done, v. 3, that all the congregation was holy, they complained that Moses had slain the Lord's people. How unreasonable to call them the people of the Lord who had stood in open rebellion against him: and to charge upon Moses and Aaron what God himself had done! Can we wonder that God was again provoked to kindle his wrath against them? He bade Moses and Aaron separate themselves from the congregation, and he would consume them. This gave occasion to the most wonderful instance of intercession recorded in all these pages.

Moses and Aaron at the words of God fell upon their faces in earnest pleadings that he would spare the guilty people. How long they continued praying, we cannot know; but perhaps the outcries in the camp, that changed from the voice of rage to that of fear, told Moses that the Divine vengeance had already taken hold upon the people. Immediately he bade Aaron, as the high priest of

the nation, take his censer, and, having kindled it at the altar from the undying fire, to go quickly into the congregation, and make an atonement for them. We can hardly understand otherwise than that Aaron in accepting this mission put himself in imminent peril. It was not by Divine command that he took this place. It shows the ardent love of Moses and Aaron for the people, that they cherish no resentment for their ingratitude towards themselves; it shows the moral courage of the high priest that he could venture to stand between the dead bodies of fourteen thousand men and the living people not yet smitten, and attempt to stay the wrath of an offended God on its onward march.

Many important lessons belong to such an act as this. It tells us that we may offer prayer to God on behalf of sinners even in circumstances that seem desperate: it shows us that God will not be displeased with the efforts which mercy and love prompt in us: it assures us that prayer can effect wonders; and not least, it affords us suggestive thoughts of a Mediator greater than Aaron who stood between the wrath of God, and sinning man; who not only exposed, but delivered his life to the stroke.

That no further difficulty might arise among the people respecting the call of the sons of Aaron to the office of the priesthood, God now gave a sign that he had thus chosen them. He directed that the princes of the congregation should take a staff for

each of the tribes, and write their names upon them, so that each might be known: and take Aaron's staff for the house of Levi; and write his name upon it: all these they were to lay before God in the tabernacle. Possibly these were the staffs commonly used by the princes, to make the sign more miraculous. Perhaps indeed they were the symbols of their official authority. Achilles, in Homer's Iliad, swears an oath upon his staff,* which he elaborately describes as dry and having every limb and leaf cut off so that it can never bloom again. So may have been the staffs of these princes. But the next morning, the rods of the other princes were found, as they had been left: and the rod of Aaron was changed. It had bloomed again, with leaves and blossoms and almonds.

Some have supposed that there was significance in every particular of this sign. The wood was of the almond tree; the earliest† of all trees to feel the approach of spring; blossoming in January, and yielding its ripe fruit in March: an emblem that Aaron's sons, as the ministers of God, should be the most ready to hear the awakening calls of grace. It brought forth fruit: signifying that though Aaron's house was separated from the inheritance of Israel, yet was it *the* fruitful family of all their tribes. But particularly herein was signified the Divine call of that family to the priesthood: a matter now placed beyond dispute, and to

* ii. 235.

† W. Neumann in Kurtz, iii. 299.

be known afterwards by the preservation of this rod. It would seem that this rod was sometimes kept in the ark, sometimes beside it. When the temple of Solomon was dedicated, there was nothing in the ark but the two tables of stone, 1 Kings viii. 9; but Paul declares that other things were in it, including Aaron's rod. Heb. ix. 4. These were doubtless placed there afterwards: and this rod was among the things lost irrecoverably in the burning of Solomon's temple.

In the New Testament age of the church the services of God are greatly changed. The ministry is no longer a priesthood; that name should no longer be applied where the distinguishing functions have ceased: and indeed all approach to priestly dignities or duties should be thought an encroachment upon the great work of our Lord Jesus Christ; who is the sole priest of the New Testament church, and can never have any associate or successor in his office, since he for ever lives to carry it on. (See Heb. vii.) And now the ministry is no longer a natural succession. To be born of Aaron's line was a Divine call to the Jewish priesthood. But the call to the Christian ministry is pre-eminently addressed to the soul of its recipient; and, though ordinarily to be ratified by the existing rule in the visible church, is to be known by the principles, teachings, and aims, of him who aspires to it. And truly it has not seldom occurred that the evident favour of God has

so crowned the labours of men in his service as to compel the people to recognize his call to them; and sometimes to lead the church to give them a special call to her regular ministry. Bold a man as John Knox was, his call to the ministry was received with much trembling and solicitude, and through no movement on his own part. His learning and ability had proved of so great service to the church that Mr. Rough addressed him in a public assembly, and in a most solemn manner called him in the name of Christ, and as he would avoid God's heavy displeasure, to take the public office and charge of preaching. The whole assembly approved this call, while Knox himself was overwhelmed. But he dare not resist the responsibility thus pressed upon him.* The call then to the ministry in the present dispensation may be variously given; but it is chiefly to be known by the teachings and spirit of him who holds it. For it is chiefly a call to teach: and we reasonably look for the most decided test of its genuineness in the qualifications of the man as a teacher. And this should be thought the plainest of all principles in a spiritual church, that no line of alleged regular descent through ecclesiastical authority can vindicate the commission of any man who claims the Christian ministry and yet is a teacher of error. The great Master who has forewarned us to beware of false teachers, whose fair professions and plaus-

* McCrie's Life of Knox, period ii.

ible arguments are fitly represented by the simile of a wolf in sheep's clothing, expressly points us to their fruits as the proper test of their claims. How can we reject a ministry that holds fast the truth of God, aims at his glory, is filled with his Spirit, and meets with the Divine sanction upon its labours in souls won to him, even though it follows not exactly with us? And how can we recognize as Divine, a ministry that makes large pretensions to succession from the very apostles; but whose teachings are false, whose religion cold and formal, whose spirit is proud and self-conceited, and whose influence has little or no power to turn men to righteousness? The fruits of many a despised ministry are evidences of Divine approval like the blooming of Aaron's rod.

It is interesting to notice that the Divine mercy in sparing the people through Aaron's intercession, and his appointment to draw near for them to God, had an effect upon them superior to that produced by the previous judgments. They were filled with a solemn awe, unfelt before. Yet when we recognize that the mercy of God often melts the soul of man to penitence while the bare declaration of wrath but tends to harden, we should learn that to produce this effect, mercy must be seen in its harmony with the justice of God. If any man supposes that the mercy of God is ever shown towards men who quarrel with his justice, they have made a fearful mistake indeed. God never contradicts,

never dishonours himself. His law is right in precept and penalty: he will never so show his mercy as even to seem to teach otherwise: and his mercy itself must be misunderstood and undervalued, unless its relations to justice are known. That God, who might so justly punish, so mercifully forgives, may well melt to penitence the guilty heart.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WANDERINGS RENEWED: THE DEATH OF AARON.

“Life’s weary work is o’er,
Thou art of earth no more,
No more art trammelled by the oppressive clay;
But tread’st with winged ease
The high acclivities
Of truths sublime, up heaven’s crystalline way.”

THE distance traversed by the children of Israel through the desert from Egypt to Canaan, did not need to occupy in actual travel more than two weeks. Yet they spent several months at Sinai to receive the instructions given by Moses: and then for their sins, they wandered forty years in the wilderness before they passed into the land of promise. We cannot decide how the people spent their years, or where they encamped. In Num. xxxiii. we have indeed a list of their several encampments: but so few data are given to ascertain the localities, or the length of time they occupied each, that we can only vaguely conjecture these matters. And indeed perhaps the people were scattered, like the present Arabs of those lands,

while the tabernacle and the pillar of cloud marked the central spot, where the government was administered and worship was paid. And, while they were under the guidance and protection of their covenant God, much was doubtless left, according to the ordinary methods of Divine dealing with us, to their own prudence, intelligence, and industry, for their safety and comfort.

The lives of Moses and Aaron and Miriam, though the youngest of the three was now a hundred and twenty years old, were spared until this last year in the desert. When they came the second time to Kadesh, Miriam died there. As yet no intimation had been given that the two brothers, who had thus far led the people, should not also lead them into Canaan; especially if we may understand, as before noticed, that the sentence of death in the wilderness did not include the tribe of Levi, to which they belonged. But when the people murmured again for water at Meribah, Moses and Aaron both fell under the displeasure of God for their presumption. We have already spoken of this: and know that both were sentenced to die in the wilderness. And these three members of one household, who had attained so great an age, who had spent forty years in such service together for the people of God, in death were not long divided. In the order of their respective ages, Miriam, Aaron and Moses died all within a single year.

But an incident here occurs in the inspired narrative between the offence and the death of Aaron. The Israelites having at last set their faces toward Canaan, were naturally desirous of passing on by as easy and short a route as possible. As the plan now entertained by Moses for entering Canaan was to cross the river Jordan and to enter the land from the eastward, the best road lay directly across the lands of two nations whom they were forbidden to attack. These were the Edomites and the Moabites. These two tribes were not Canaanites, but were kindred to the Israelites themselves. The Edomites were descended from Jacob's brother Esau: and the Moabites, from Lot, the nephew of Abraham. So the express commands of God were, that they should not meddle with Edom, for God had given Mount Seir to Esau for his possession: and that they should not distress the Moabites nor contend with them in battle, for God had given Ar to the children of Lot. See Deut. ii. 4, 5, 9, 19. We shall afterwards see that war did spring up with Moab: but the children of Israel were not the aggressors.

Obeying the Divine commands, Moses sent ambassadors to both these tribes desiring permission to pass peaceably through their territories. There is indeed no record in the books of Moses of any messengers sent to Moab: but in a later part of their history, in negotiations with that people,

this is mentioned as an undisputed historical fact. See Judges xi. 17. As Moab lay back of Edom, the refusal of the Edomites shut out the Israelites from this contemplated route, and made it unnecessary here to mention Moab at all.

Travellers testify that there is a large and broad valley passing through the Edomitish territories entirely suitable for the march of an army. As the incursion of so large a host might expose the Edomites to various troubles, Moses offered to make their passage not only safe but even profitable, by abstaining from pillage and every irregularity, and by purchasing fairly whatever stores they might need. But the king of Edom, either apprehensive that collisions might happen between him and the Israelites: or fearing that he might be embroiled with the neighbouring tribes against whom this people might march with his seeming connivance, refused to allow them to pass through his territories. Perhaps indeed he considered his dominions as the frontier state; and that he was bound to guard the mountain-passes which in that direction were easily defended. So he not only refused the desired permission, but marshalled his forces and came out to resist their passage. For the reason already stated, the Israelites did not attack him; but gave over the attempt to pass that way.

At a subsequent period, the Edomites are said

to have done just what they here refuse. They resisted Moses when he approached them on their strong western border; but when they found that he had passed entirely around their territories, and approached them upon a weaker side, they were quite willing to be friends. Deut. ii. 29.

Embracing the only alternative left to them, the Israelites began their journey to pass around Edom. Mount Hor, which they soon reached, is celebrated for the death of the high priest, Aaron. The simplicity of the Scriptural narrative records in very brief terms what must have been a most solemn and affecting scene. If we bring before our minds these two venerable men, we see one of them one hundred and twenty-three years old, and the other but three years younger; both of them assured that they must die in the desert; and therefore as the wilderness-march was nearly ended, both to die that very year. Death is always a solemn event: yet usually it steals upon men unawares. Here Aaron is told that he must die. Perhaps like his brother he was in full health, "his eye not dim nor his natural force abated." All the circumstances are impressive. The venerable age of the principal actors, their long attachment to each other, their relations to that great people, the calm approach to that final hour, were deeply affecting. The farewell scene with the people is not described. But when Israel parted with

their first high priest, who for forty years had ministered for them at the altar of God, had gone for them behind the veil, and had so often plead for their forgiveness; when they saw him wearing for the last time his priestly robes; and when they stood in the doors of their tents, and saw that little funeral procession go slowly up the steep ascent of Mount Hor, without bier, or corpse; saw the man who was to be buried, and the near and dear friends who were to bury him, go side by side together; we can easily judge such grief filled the camp of Israel as the departure of no other man had as yet called forth. The death of one man is often a national loss: and the people, since the days of Joseph, had perhaps met with no bereavement comparable to the death of Aaron.

We cannot conjecture the emotions, or imagine the words of the little party as they passed up upon this solemn errand. But we may reasonably judge that Aaron was as ready to submit to the will of God in this case, as he had before been upon a far more trying occasion: Lev. x. 3, and that with calm serenity, as before God, and with serious and venerable dignity before his son and his brother, he passed onward. He may have spoken in their ears brief words of penitence for past unfaithfulness; or uttered his desires for things to be said or done hereafter; or expressed his cheerful hopes as he was now about to ascend

higher than the earthly mountain to the presence of his God. There are different ways of dying; but it is easy to judge how it is desirable to die. Holy words, holy thoughts, holy hopes become the final hour. No feebleness, no stupor clogged the thoughts or energies of Aaron: and though friends stood by at his departure, they seemed to have no soothing or ministering office to perform to assist his helplessness while he was yet living.

It is evident that some matters connected with the death of Aaron were designed to be public. "They went up in the sight of all the congregation." Doubtless this includes that when Aaron stood on the mount he looked down upon the people for whom he had ministered in holy things for nearly half a century; and took his last leave of them, and of his sacred duties for them. He was a priest as long as he was with them: but now that he has done his earthly work, the robes and the office of the priesthood must pass over to his son and successor. But we cannot believe that Aaron could put away from him the robes of office, and lay aside, first these duties, and then his life, without a swelling tide of emotions, almost enough of themselves to break the cords of his full heart. He who had so often offered up sacrifices, first for his own sins and then for the people, must now offer his last prayers for the Divine forgiveness. He who had so often besought the blessing of God

upon the afflicted people in that mournful march, now sees their grief called forth in regard to his own departure. He who had often gone with anxious steps behind the vail was now about to pass within the vail indeed, to see God, and never to return.

That is an affecting record, made of the last act of that godly young minister, Robert Murray M'Cheyne, that "he lifted up his hands as if in the attitude of pronouncing the blessing, and then sank down. Not a groan or a sigh, but only a quiver of the lip, and the soul was at rest." What a fitting departure for one whose life had been spent in blessing others. Doubtless the last thoughts of the aged high priest, now going to his God, were for a blessing upon the Lord's people.*

And just before thus inheriting the glory, just before parting from the people to whom he was so attached, perhaps *he* pronounced once again upon Israel the threefold benediction, "The Lord bless thee and keep thee: the Lord make his face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace." And then, his earthly service finished, Aaron meekly allowed that Eleazar his son should be clothed with the sacred robes of his great office. It is not uncommon for a son to take his father's place when he is removed: this was the Divine arrangement for the priesthood: but

* See also Memoir of Dr. N. Murray, 374.

such a ceremony as then took place is seldom seen. Doubtless it was intended to teach that the priesthood continued even when a priest died. The office and the man are very different things: and the people were not without a mediator between them and God even when Aaron died. And not only that the office might be seen to be continued, but that no doubt might exist of the person to whom it was transmitted, the vestments of the priesthood were put upon Eleazar. We further know that all this was through the inferiority of the Aaronic priesthood; and we rejoice in a High Priest who can have no successor, because he ever liveth.

It is wise that no description is given of the death and burial of Aaron; or of his tomb upon Mount Hor. Israel's high priest died, we may suppose, without needless pangs, laid to rest by God's own hand. It was quite otherwise indeed many years afterwards with that greater High Priest of whom Aaron was a type. God's servants die in peace: precious in his sight is the death of his saints: but it was not so with God's own Son. Peaceful may have been the death of Aaron; but the agonizing cry of Jesus spoke the anguish of his soul. For our great High Priest bore our sins that we might be free; endured a bitter death, that we might triumph over the last foe.

The place of Aaron's burial is shown to this day:

and though doubtless the building which now occupies the summit of Mount Hor is of comparatively recent erection, there seems no reason to doubt the locality. Various travellers* have visited the place and described the building. It is frequented by the tribes of that region, who are all Mohammedans; and various services are rendered, indicative of their respect for the memory of Israel's first high priest.

The wife of Aaron was Elisheba. Ex. vi. 23. The priesthood descending to Eleazar, was, for some unknown reason, transferred to the sons of Ithamar at some period before the days of Eli: but it was by Solomon restored to the line of Eleazar in the person of Zadok.

* Stephens' Egypt, &c., ii. 73.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BRAZEN SERPENT.

“As Moses in the wilderness
The serpent raised on high,
So God’s own Son, oh, wondrous grace!
For guilty man must die;
And whoso in his cross believes,
Salvation large and free receives.”

DOUBTLESS the change of route, which resulted from the refusal of the Edomitish king, was felt by the Israelites as a great disappointment. The long years of the curse had at length worn away; they had gladly seen the pillar of cloud rise from the tabernacle and give the signal for moving forward; and they had hoped that soon their feet would press the soil of the promised land. And just at this moment, to have the direct way shut up: to see that instead of subduing all their enemies, God even forbade them to try their strength upon the Edomites: and to be sent away round through what was really the worst part of the wilderness, was all so different from their thoughts that we can hardly wonder at the record, “the soul of the people was much discouraged because

of the way.’’ Yet if in their dejection they had submitted to the will of God, all might still have been well. But unmindful of the former lessons, they murmured against God. Perhaps in their intercourse with the tribes of the border, they may have obtained some supplies of grain: and in comparing this with the manna, they found new ground of complaint. Thus we see that notwithstanding their many judgments, they were substantially the same people as before: though a remarkable change took place between this and their entrance into Canaan. The young generation that conquered the Canaanites was remarkable for piety and zeal for God, owing in part to the active duties that devolved upon them. For it cannot be questioned that the indolence of the wilderness was unfavourable to the proper development of a religious character; and that the busy industry of an active life may promote a vigorous and healthy faith.

Because of the rebellion of the people a new judgment came upon them. ‘‘The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, and much people of Israel died.’’ Num. xxi. 6. Travellers say that serpents and scorpions abound in parts of these deserts: and one mentions a serpent that was shown to him, very large and mottled with *fiery* spots.* They may here be called *fiery* serpents, either from their appearance, or from the effects of their bite. If the wound made

* Kurtz, iii. 343.

by them produced fiery burning, intense inflammation, and parching thirst, it would be natural to call them fiery serpents.

We can easily understand that this kind of punishment for their sin brought the people to cry out for deliverance. While it was an easy thing for God thus to judge them, it was terrible to them. No other living thing is more dreaded by man than the serpent: few animals except serpents infuse poison by their bite;* and there is much that is peculiarly terrible in that mode of suffering. The people cried unto God. Yet if they had been delivered by the mere disappearance of the serpents, they would soon have regarded the whole thing, their appearance and their disappearance, as governed by merely natural causes: and thus the moral effect of the whole would have been lost. To show therefore the Divine hand, and at the same time for a permanent memorial and symbol of his grace, God took a new and singular method for their relief. He directed Moses to make an image of a serpent, of brass or perhaps of copper, and to erect it upon a pole in some conspicuous part of the camp: and he promised that every bitten Israelite, who should look upon this image, should be healed from the bite of these deadly reptiles. Nothing is told us of the size of this image; nor of the place where it was raised: nor are any special incidents narrated of its wonderful efficacy.

* Unless we include insects.

We learn from its being made, and from its subsequent history, that the second commandment of Sinai was not designed to forbid the mere making of pictures or images: but to forbid the making and use of any for religious worship. Here the very lawgiver, and expressly by the Divine command, made an image: in this therefore there was no wrong: but when this very same image was long afterwards perverted to an idolatrous use, it was broken up by order of good king Hezekiah, with contemptuous expressions towards it when used in that capacity. 2 Kings xviii. 4.

Brief as the narrative is, in the book of Numbers, there is scarcely any part of the writings of Moses that has called forth more interest than this. Many volumes have been written upon the brazen serpent: and various styles of interpretation have been adopted in regard to it. We do not need to attempt any sketch of these various explanations of this transaction. We are however evidently taught, and this by the highest authority, that the lifting up of the brazen serpent in the wilderness had a spiritual significance of great importance. Our Lord himself in his conversation with Nicodemus declares that his own sacrifice upon the cross was symbolized by the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness. If then we can put together the narrative of Moses, and this exposition of Christ, we may receive instruction which was designed to be permanent in the church. This is among the

things that were written before time for our learning. Rom. xv. 4.

It makes the narrative concerning the brazen serpent possess the greater interest as thus referred to by Christ, because we are thus taught to regard this as part of a series of types that are set before us in the history of the church of God, and particularly in the writings of Moses. We have not failed to notice this in former chapters; and specially have noticed that the rock that gave water to the Israelites was a type of Christ, by Paul's direct exposition. 1 Cor. x. 4. But indeed we cannot too well know that Israel was a typical people, and that much of their history was designed for the profit of later days. "All these things," says the apostle, "happened to them for TYPES, and they are written for our admonition." 1 Cor. x. 11. Their bondage and deliverance, their miracles and their forms of worship, the ark, the tabernacle, the altar, the sacrifices, the priests, the golden candlestick, the silver trumpets, the shew bread, the manna, the water in the wilderness, the journey, the Jordan and the promised land, were all both historical and typical: signifying more than met the eye. Some of these things are plainer and more expressive than others: but the typical teachings of the Bible well deserve our study.

Two questions in regard to them are entirely distinct from each other. First, How much did the Israelites understand of them? and second,

What were they really designed to teach? We may very properly judge that the Israelites were taught profitable knowledge by these types, while yet they stopped very far short of a clear understanding of them; and the very fact that they did not fully know the meaning of the writings they have passed down to us, forms a part of the internal evidences that their sacred books were written by more than human wisdom. As the fact that the prophets did not understand their own prophecies, (Compare Dan. xii. 8, 1 Pet. i. 11,) is proof even more complete that God spoke by them: so the types are prophecies in a bodily form; put before the eyes of men, rather than addressed to their ears. Men have seen the offerings of God from the days of Abel downward: the sight was impressive, easily remembered, and to thousands profitable and saving: but the degree of understanding would differ greatly with different ages and individuals. So indeed even in our days of better light, the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, may greatly profit the souls of those who imperfectly comprehend them.

In interpreting the brazen serpent as a type of Christ we know that we are upon safe ground, for we are following his own teachings. The precise point of comparison made by our Lord is the lifting up of the serpent as a likeness of his being lifted up: but we cannot understand this, without carrying the comparison further. If the healing

power exerted in the wilderness may be compared to the healing virtue of Christ crucified, it must be because there is an analogy also between the evils in both cases. This indeed is so. The Israelites were punished by the serpents in the wilderness, because they were sinners against God: and it would be no forced comparison to show that the same characteristics of sin, as ungrateful and presumptuous and unbelieving, belong to us in these later times. We indeed differ greatly from them; yet substantially the same principles govern us. Under solemn obligations to fear the same God, to obey the same law, to rejoice in the same guiding Providence; and having even greater responsibilities because of clearer teachings, we yet are sinners after the example of the rebels in the wilderness.

It seems to show the absence of all human relief that the people cried unto the Lord in their distress. And the remedy is such as man would not have devised. It was the more evidently a Divine deliverance that no natural connection could be perceived between looking at the serpent of brass, and healing for a deadly wound. Why a serpent was made use of, as a representative of Christ, we can but conjecture. The image of the evil may have been preserved, because our Redeemer was to be made in the likeness of sinful flesh, though not a sinner: and the meaner metal, brass, is thought to signify the Redeemer's estate of humiliation.

So the altar of burnt offering, the type of our Lord's sacrifice upon earth, was covered with brass: and the altar of incense, standing within the vail, the type of our Lord's intercession in heaven, was covered with gold.*

The lifting up of the serpent is a type of the crucifixion of Christ. And this mute prophecy is the more remarkable, because crucifixion never was a Jewish mode of punishment. Had the Jews put Christ to death by their own laws, they would have stoned him, as they stoned Stephen. This act of Moses foreshadowed his surrender into the hands of Pilate and his death by Roman law: though six hundred years elapsed after the death of Moses before the Roman people had any existence. And yet we may also say that not only the crucifixion of Christ but the public preaching of salvation through Christ is symbolized by the lifted serpent. Christ must not only be crucified but made known. Moses was directed to lift the brazen serpent upon a pole: and this doubtless was done in such a way as to enable the bitten Israelites to see the means of healing as easily as possible from every part of the camp. Some commanding position was chosen for the

* The fanciful interpretations of former times are often very singular. Augustine says the serpent was of brass and not of gold or silver, because brass is more enduring and more sonorous, as the gospel was to sound all abroad.—Works, x. 260. Witsius suggests that brass and gold in the altars are significant of his humiliation and exaltation.

standard in which all the smitten people had so great an interest.

But of course the most interesting part of the whole was the healing of the people by so simple means. "It came to pass that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass he lived." A simple instrumentality, man was called upon to use; and the power of God effected his cure. It is true, God could have removed the serpents, and have healed these wounds, without any such means: yet man should cheerfully adopt the divine methods of mercy, and rejoice in their simplicity. The likeness of all this to the methods of salvation as proclaimed in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is manifest to every thoughtful reader of the Scriptures. The true gospel is indeed wonderfully superior to the very plainest and most striking of all the ancient types. For example, when we think of the brazen serpent the connection seems simply an appointed one between its lifting up and the healing of the bitten. We cannot see that the serpent could represent any appeasing of the Divine displeasure: we rest the entire efficacy of its sight, upon the Divine appointment. But it is far otherwise with the crucifixion of Christ, and the proclamation of pardon through his death. This was indeed by Divine appointment: but an appointment justified by the exalted dignity of Christ Jesus, by the vicarious nature of his sufferings, and by the inherent

worthiness of his sacrifice to atone for the sins that are pardoned by the sight of his cross. We make a very great mistake indeed if we insist upon the necessity of faith in Christ unto salvation, and lay out of view, those essential elements of his death upon the cross which justify the firmest and most unwavering faith. It is CHRIST who died; and died for us; and therefore we may look and live.

This type, especially as explained by our Lord, teaches us that every sinner who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved. The Israelites had but to look, and they lived. There might be many diversities among them. Some had been bitten in more vital parts: in some the venom had swelled more fully through their veins: some were nearly dead already. But there was the same call in the ears of each, "Look up and live." There was no virtue in the look; yet it was the means of cure. Some, through vain reasonings, might despise the simple remedy; yet they did so at their peril. The plain command was, LOOK; the proof was as plain that many by looking had been healed. But in every respect salvation to guilty sinners is as fully proclaimed to every believer in Him who died for us on Calvary.

If many Israelites in the desert needed a remedy for these dreadful wounds, we all need relief from sin: if no natural evil is more dreaded than a serpent's venom, yet sin is a more fearful thing; if the bite of these reptiles was fatal to the body,

sin is destructive to the soul: if no human power could give them relief, every sinner is lost beyond human recovery: if a look could heal them, God assures us that every one that believeth in Christ shall be saved. Every just consideration urges the sinful soul to take hold of this divine promise. We all are sinners. We have often confessed this; yet have apologized for sin and delayed our penitence. But we should review our lives, seek out of the law of God its holy demands, recognize the vileness of our natural estate, and confess that we are unworthy, perishing, and helpless. But God can save. He has sent his Son for this end. In considering the exalted character of Christ, the nature of his atoning work when lifted up for us, the efficacy of his blood, the prevalence of his intercessions, the freeness of his grace and the largeness of his promises, we should rejoice to learn how God can save. Faith in Christ is to believe the teachings of the Scriptures that God has given his Son thus to die for us: for his sake to reject every other dependence for our salvation; and to receive and rest upon him as freely offered to us in the gospel. The glory is all his: the free blessing ours. As there was no merit in the look, so there is no worthiness in faith: but by faith we receive the blessing God graciously imparts. And the very terms encourage sinners of every variety: the very chief of sinners may believe and live for ever.

CHAPTER XXI.

BALAAAM.

“And can he choose but fear,
Who feels his God so near,
That, when he fain would curse, his powerless tongue
In blessings only moves?
Alas, the world he loves
Too close around his heart its tangling veil hath flung.”

KEBLE.

IT is natural to suppose that the sudden appearance of the Israelites on the borders of Canaan, after their long seclusion in the wilderness, would spread great alarm among the tribes whose territories they seemed about to invade. We do not wonder that those nations assumed the posture of self-defence; that some of them even made the first movement of warfare, especially if they knew that the issue was victory or extermination. Yet many of them girded themselves for the desperate conflict with fainting spirits, as they remembered what the God of this people had done for them in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and through the wilderness. We have already intimated that some tribes were excepted from the commission of the Israelites. It

may be that all those whose lands lay between the river Jordan and the wilderness, including all the tribes that were conquered during the lifetime of Moses, would have remained unmolested, if they had not, by their folly, precipitated themselves into war. The Israelites were forbidden to attack the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, and the Ammonites and Moabites, the descendants of Lot; and they would not have conquered the Amorites and Og, king of Bashan, but for their rashness in beginning hostilities.

We have seen that the Edomites not only refused Moses a peaceable passage through their territories; but came out to meet him in a menacing manner. Yet as Moses did not accept the challenge, no harm came of it. The Moabites, as the people of Israel came round to their borders, were troubled also; and they did not seem to credit the assurance that the Israelites were forbidden to molest them. But with all their jealousy at the near neighbourhood of such a body of people, they felt too weak to use direct force against them. It may be that because they had heard of the works of Jehovah, they thought it needful to invoke against them supernatural powers that might prove equally formidable.

And thus through the fears of Balak, king of Moab, we have introduced to our notice one of the most remarkable characters of antiquity, Balaam, the son of Beor. This man resided in the moun-

tainous parts of Mesopotamia, at some distance from Balak; and had a high reputation for supernatural abilities. He has long been a mystery upon the sacred pages, for the strange mingling of the vile and the precious. The remarkable basis of this mystery is the fact, that, dwelling among a heathen people, he was a prophet, and at times certainly, favoured with revelations from Jehovah: yet he was evidently a wicked man, loving the wages of unrighteousness, promoting the evil schemes of others, and dying finally by the sword of Israel. Num. xxxi. 8. It seems a lesson of peculiar profit that we should tarry to study the character and opinions and thoughts of this man. We will find him having considerable acquaintance with truth and duty: restrained in many ways from the desires of his own heart: making fair professions towards God's people and desiring to share in their peculiar privileges: and yet having his heart set on other and inconsistent things, living among the enemies of righteousness, and even pronouncing his own awful doom as one afar off from God.

The knowledge which Balaam had of God's truth, and man's duty, and of the mercy promised to Israel, we may gather from the expressions he himself uttered. How he came to know the true God, we cannot decide. Perhaps he belonged to the tribes in Mesopotamia from whom Abraham himself had emigrated; and his religious views may have been the decaying remnant of that piety

which we know was declining in the family of Laban. But Balaam was a prophet of the true God: an inconsistent one, as we shall see, seeking enchantments and yet seeking the Lord: but a true one. He even foretold the coming of Christ. “There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall arise out of Israel.” Some have indeed understood this as a prophecy of David, especially as David did destroy the Moabites, and as the king here spoken of is described as a destroyer, and not as the Prince of Peace. But Balaam expressly speaks of things to happen at *the latter days*; the Jews have long considered this as a Messianic prophecy; and when the Scriptures speak of Christ’s going forth against his foes, here represented by the Moabites, it is no uncommon thing to speak of him as a Conqueror. And Balaam speaks of such an increase of God’s people as best belongs to the spread of Christ’s beneficent kingdom. “Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel?” He knew that this was a people chosen of Jehovah, greatly beloved by him, and justified by him from all iniquity. “How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed? and how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied?” “Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob: neither is there divination against Israël.” God’s covenant, he knew, could not be broken; for he “is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent.

Hath he said, and shall he not do? "Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel." Moreover Balaam knew that Israel's blessings pertained to everlasting life: for he speaks of the death of the righteous as evidently esteeming that the most excellent part of their blessed lot.

From a remarkable passage in the prophecies of Micah we learn yet more of Balaam's acquaintance with the ways of righteousness.* We there learn that the king of Moab inquired of Balaam in what way he could acceptably approach the God of Israel in acts of worship. Shall we suppose, that in view of what God had done for Israel and of the report that had gone forth to the nations of his power and grace, this Gentile king then pondered the most momentous question that ever agitates the breast of man, whether he is a monarch upon his throne, or a worshipper in the pews of a Christian sanctuary? Alas, if Balak did this, he yet refused to hear the words of wisdom; and the rather, perhaps in one fatal hour, separated his throne and his race from truth and duty and salvation. But he did ask the way of life, and seemed ready to pursue it, even at costly sacrifices. His inquiry is, "Wherewith shall I come before God, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before

* See Gill and Bishop Butler. Others interpret quite otherwise. See Henderson's Minor Prophets, and Smith's Dict., art. Balaam.

him with burnt-offerings and calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression? the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" Micah vi. 6, 7. Thus he seems ready to make any effort, except indeed those self-renouncing efforts that are more accordant with genuine religion. The answer of Balaam does not perhaps mean to deny the proper offering of sacrifices as a means of approaching God; but he expressly calls his attention to other important matters, overlooked in the thoughts of Balak. "He hath showed thee, oh man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God." These words help us to form a better estimate of Balaam's acquaintance with the principles of true piety. He clearly recognizes the necessity of atoning sacrifices; for these he repeatedly offered. But he knew also that the mere offering of the most costly sacrifices could not secure acceptance with the Lord: and therefore he expressly urges the great duties of justice, mercy and humility, which are tokens of reconciliation to God, and evidences that the heart is truly interested in the service of the Holy One.

But Balaam not only knew the principles of true piety: he longed to possess the blessedness of God's people.

It is natural for man to seek good. A man,

without any true relish for religion, may long for the safety of the church of God, and for a share in the blessings promised to the righteous. We need not wonder that Balaam desired a part in the great mercies of Israel. His prophetic visions looked forward to glorious days for this favoured people. “How goodly are thy tents, oh Jacob, and thy tabernacles, oh Israel; as the valleys are they spread forth; as gardens by the river’s side; as the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted; and as cedar trees beside the waters.” And not only because of promised good did Balaam long for a part among God’s people; but because he foresaw the miserable destruction of the foes of God. “Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee.”

It has been questioned by some commentators upon the Old Testament, whether the thoughts of Balaam passed beyond this life, even when he longed to die the death of the righteous. The doubt is founded upon the conception that immortal life was not revealed to the ancient church of God; and a learned prelate of the English establishment has written an elaborate treatise designed to prove the “Divine Legation of Moses,” for the very reason that immortality, though well known to Moses and the patriarchs, still does not form a part of his teachings! Yet how does such a theory charge stupidity upon all who knew the patriarchs or ever read their history. Abraham became a pil-

grim though he knew that Canaan could not be his for four hundred years: he declared by his very language that he sought another country, even a heavenly; he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose maker and builder is God; his whole race were believers in invisible things: they renounced the present by faith in the future: and yet we are gravely told that they taught nothing of immortal life. We see not the slightest reason to judge so. The doctrine of the soul's immortality is essentially incorporated with the entire teachings of the Bible; and we are not to take the words of Balaam in so tame a sense as to suppose that he speaks only of the past, and not of the future. Here, as in all history, the religion of the Bible gathers trophies from death, and proves its power to bless where confessedly the world fails.* Balaam looked beyond this life. He knew that the curse upon the enemies of God was an abiding curse: he knew that his favour upon his people was an everlasting blessedness: and as he trembled in view of the awful and enduring contrast, it is no wonder that he shrank back from the hopeless horror that gathers in everlasting gloom about the death of the ungodly.

This is a topic upon which we might very easily expand our thoughts: a topic that should never grow trite by the largest familiarity: in which every soul has an immense personal interest; for in our

* R. Hall, ii. 395.

various ways and times we all must meet the common foe of our fallen family. Men indeed are often willing to live afar from God and duty, when so they do not wish to die. Balaam's language utters but a tribute to the value of piety in the last hours of life, to which in every age since, human nature has responded. Here is one spot of earth at least, sacred to piety. Here is one place and time, where by confession of all, godliness is great gain. Madness indeed does rule in some men's hearts to the last; and they have no bands even in their death. In wickedness they live: with seared consciences they approach eternity: in stupidity, they die; and then, when the veil drops, indifference and ignorance and carnal joy flee far and for ever away!

But to men who dare to think seriously of death and all that lies beyond it, that final event wears a different aspect. When men thoughtfully and wisely approach the banks of that final river, they would give the world and all its treasures for one gleam of pious hope to cast its light across the dark valley through which now they must pass. And sometimes when death does not seem near, even in the vigour of health, dissatisfied with earth's best joys, and conscious of immortality, men cast their eyes forward, and in fears of death and subject to their bondage, they wish they were but prepared to die. Perhaps, like Balaam, they have contemplated the holy principles and prospects

of the righteous: or perhaps the providence of God has led them to that happy

“chamber where the good man meets his fate,
So privileged beyond the common walks
Of virtuous life, quite on the verge of heaven.”

There is something about the dying bed of the child of God, when peace folds over that couch her gentle wings, that should attract and does attract the attention of men. There are indeed varying scenes in the departing of pious men. Yet the calm departure, so often seen in a thoughtful Christian, shows that for which human philosophy cannot account; for which human sinfulness is wholly unprepared; and which impiety and infidelity cannot imitate. And sometimes the joy of the dying believer is ecstatic: peculiar mercy gathers around the fast fleeting moments of life: the wan face beams celestial light upon the astonished beholders: and lessons of eternity are given which time no where else affords. Sometimes we are almost led to believe that, even before the mortal tie is sundered, the ministering spirits of glory already commune with the soul just about to be born into heaven; and that intercourse with eternity already begun, dictates the last utterances we so love to ponder, and leaves those last sweet expressions upon the pallid clay! “Do you not see the angels?” said a dying saint, when she had passed too far down the valley to hear the reply of weep-

ing husband and children around her. Oh, how desirable death seems in such a case! How many have uttered the fervent wish that they could be in the place of such a favoured one. So Balaam longed. In view of the blessedness of the righteous and of the curse of the wicked; with the full knowledge that eternity belonged to each, he uttered these words, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" Vain words on the lips of one who would not live as do the righteous! And in every age since, the same wish has been as transiently felt and as vainly uttered by thousands like the inconsistent prophet. Men may have their serious, solemn thoughts of death, and their earnest longings to die like the righteous: yet may live in sin, die without hope, and inherit everlasting despair.

But the records given us concerning Balaam show that in some degree he conformed his life to the knowledge he possessed; obeyed some promptings of conscientious conviction; and feared the displeasure of the Almighty.

Sin wrought in him rather in deceitful than in open forms. He did many things of which we can approve; and doubtless found ready excuses for all his forms of evil. He knew how to counsel others in the way of life: as we learn from his teachings to the king of Moab. Mic. vi. 5-8. So he refused to go with the messengers of Balak until the Lord gave him permission: and he steadfastly

refused to curse whom the Lord had not cursed. We cannot indeed judge that any true principles of righteousness influenced him in these things. We are taught in him that the restraining power of God's Spirit holds back the consciences of men from evils they greatly desire to do. And often-times, under more delusion than Balaam, men make their efforts in duty through these restraints of Providence, the grounds of personal security: as if the character and prospects were thus determined. But in matters of personal religion, nothing is more common than for even thoughtful men to indulge what an eminent English writer calls "a certain unfairness of mind, a peculiar inward dishonesty."* There must be some way with every man to make his sins and thoughts of future judgment "sit easy on his mind." In some men this is through superstition; in others through radical error; in others through self-righteous doings, false religious hopes, or vain promises of a future repentance. And thus many men perish by cheating their souls by deceitful hopes.

But before we are through with Balaam we are fully persuaded that he was a wicked man.

Through plausible professions and fair appearances we sometimes judge more favourably of men than they deserve. But the wise man says, "Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift, is like clouds and wind without rain." Prov. xxv. 14.

*Bishop Butler's Sermon on Balaam.

Sooner or later, Providence usually places such men in circumstances which exhibit their true characters. When we read that Balaam dismissed the ambassadors of Balak, because God forbade him to go, we form a favourable opinion of him. But when more honourable ambassadors arrived, and a larger price was offered for his services, “the iniquity of his heart began to disclose itself.”* If Balaam had been a righteous man and honest at heart, he would have resented the insult shown to his character as a prophet by the offer of larger rewards for such a purpose. Could a righteous prophet hear without indignation a temptation of bribery? For it could be nothing less, after he had told them that this people was blessed: and he should have dismissed the later messengers even more summarily than the first.

But though plainly knowing what he *should* do, Balaam entertained the men, and deliberated that night what he *would* do. And God, doubtless with tokens of displeasure for his parleying with temptation, permitted him to go. Balaam knew that this permission was given in displeasure. Indeed the angel of God met him and sought to slay him: and the ass on which he rode speaking with man’s lips forbade the prophet’s madness. Yet still he went with the ambassadors of Balak; with renewed permission indeed, but influenced by his own motives. The true reason of his conduct we

* Bishop Butler.

are twice told in the New Testament. “He loved the wages of unrighteousness.” 2 Pet. ii. 15. “He ran greedily after reward.” Jude 11. Well as he knew the way of righteousness, the honours and rewards of this life could tempt him to iniquity. Doubtless even then he dealt dishonestly with himself by maintaining some consistency in his prophetic utterances. He refused to speak as Balak wished: he blessed only, where the king bade him curse: there were certain lengths he would not go: he did not wholly lose the restraints of conscience.

But he was willing to aid others in doing what he would not personally do: he was willing that Israel should be cursed, if only he did not do it: he was willing to share the rewards of evil counsel. He knew that Israel could be injured only by being corrupted: and he taught the king of Moab how to corrupt them. We read that the Israelites were led into idolatry and fornication by the Midianites; and that for their wickedness God sent fearful judgments upon both nations. Balaam designed and counselled this whole matter. So Moses declares, Num. xxxi. 16; and so we are elsewhere told. Rev. ii. 14. This is the wickedness of his heart.

Balaam teaches us serious lessons. It is dangerous to tamper with the teachings of conscience. See here that God not only allows men to form wicked plans, but to carry them into execution:

the way of evil opens up before us: and advantages we greatly desire are offered to us in it. We must learn to guide our steps, not by the promptings of our own hearts, nor even by the apparent openings of Providence, but by the light of holy and righteous principles. We must instruct our consciences in the will and word of God; and then promptly and consistently obey their first, clear dictates. "In matters of prudence, second thoughts are often the best; but in matters of conscience first thoughts" are usually "our truest guides. Deliberation and demur, so valuable on many other occasions, are here most dangerous: reasoning here will only lead us into perilous paths: the moment we attempt to persuade ourselves that something of which we doubt the rectitude, is allowable, we stand on the brink of a precipice that has been fatal to millions."* The thoughts and conduct are so biassed by an evil heart that we are with difficulty faithful to ourselves: and when our desires and our consciences come in conflict, there is great danger that the slightest departure from duty may provoke God to leave us to our own wickedness; that we will walk in the way of Balaam; that we will die as Balaam died.

For, at the last, Balaam perished among the enemies of God. Vain was his wish to die the death of the righteous. He returned to Balak, and directed the infamous plot against Israel's

* R. Hall's Works, iv. 375.

purity. But both these wicked men plotted to their own mischief, for their sin returned upon them. Though Moses had been before forbidden to make war against Moab, yet now as they had made an alliance with the Midianites to work these evils against the Israelites, he attacked them both. And in this warfare, Balaam, the prophet, was slain by the sword of righteous dealing, among the guilty tempters of Israel, himself the chief of them. His death was not that of the righteous. Perhaps we may even understand that in life he anticipated his own banishment from the presence of the predicted Messiah. “I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh.” From the top of the rocks he foresaw his distant coming: from his elevation as a prophet he saw, yet from his moral standing he should not see him nigh. There is a sense in which every eye shall see him. But Balaam says of himself, not *now*: and alas, never *NIGH*. What a lot was his! To desire the death of the righteous; yet to anticipate his own separation from them and his everlasting distance from their glorious king!

What serious lessons should every later age learn from the history of Balaam. Specially let every soul learn the danger of trifling with the decisions of truth and conscience. Let us faithfully instruct the conscience: let us not live so that our own minds are not satisfied: let us not be deceived. We should know the way of righteousness even

more abundantly than he. God has given us the privileges of an enlightened age, and his word, and his Spirit to guide us in the ways of truth. God teaches us his character and our own: the righteousness of his law and our transgressions under it; the grace of the gospel and its offers for our salvation; the blessedness of his favour, the curses of his wrath. It is not enough for us to hear only, these great teachings: to long indolently for the blessedness of the righteous: to fear transiently the misery of the condemned. It is not enough to form purposes of a future repentance; to be almost persuaded to the choice of piety; or to conform our lives in some degree to the demands of his righteousness. We may even go, in the paths that Balaam trod, further than he went; and yet perish for ever. We may have an external connection, not with Moab but with Israel. We may carefully copy many principles and duties of piety. Yet one cherished sin may ruin the soul. There would be no such partial consecration to God, if our hearts were right in his sight. That piety which springs from the renewal of our nature by God's Holy Spirit, must ever be sincere before him: and the folly of keeping back a part of the price is as great in any man or woman as in Ananias and Sapphira; and long before their day, in the inconsistent Balaam.

Men may lose their souls when they are well instructed in piety; have many serious thoughts of

religion: and have impressive views of death. It is not only the outrageously wicked, not only the careless and thoughtless, who lose their souls. But in any case, what a fearful loss is the loss of the soul! And this especially when the man has been trained in the very sanctuary of God!

The character of Balaam, as set forth in the graphic descriptions of the sacred text, has been the theme of serious and profitable instruction, dwelt upon by eminent Christian preachers. Bishop Hall speaks of Balaam's falsehood assuming the garb of truth, and condemns the piety of his lips in contrast with the covetousness of his heart, *Contemplations*: Bishop Butler exposes the self-deception that endeavoured to reconcile his covetous wishes with the known will of God, *Sermon vii.*: Mr. Newman exhibits the peril of grasping ambition, *Sermons*, iv. 21: Dr. Arnold contrasts the high standard of his faith with the low standard of his morality, *Sermons*, vi. 55: Dr. Hunter laments that the finest abilities should be disfigured and misled by the heart's depravity, *Lect. lxvii.-lxxi.*: and Robert Hall shows the darkening influence of evil passions to gloss over wrong and to confound it with good. *Works*, iv. 373. How contemptible are the flings of Dr. Stanley against the usual teachings of Christian theologians, when in spite of plain Biblical teachings of Balaam's wickedness and of these discussions, several of them directly

referred to by himself; in spite of his own recognition that Balaam “was as great an enemy of the church as Julian;” he speaks as if this man was unjustly treated by the theologians, and ranks him, as if by Scriptural authority, among the true teachers of man, among “the higher spirits of every age and of every nation.”* Such spurious—shall we not say affected—candour may be esteemed among the most dangerous symptoms of serious decline in the English establishment. His insinuation that the whole account of Balaam is an episode, introduced into the Book of Numbers at a later period, is incapable of proof, breathes the same spirit of affected liberality, and deserves little respect.

* History of the Jewish Church. Lecture viii. 210.

CHAPTER XXII.

A PSALM OF LIFE.

“O God, our help in ages past!
Our hope for years to come;
Be thou our guard while troubles last,
And our eternal home!”

THE great lawgiver of the Jewish people was not only a statesman, a ruler, a warrior, and a historian, but also a poet: and a MAN OF GOD in them all. We need not be surprised that his great mind should seem to unbend to give forth its utterances in poetic numbers. Poetry is not the mind’s stooping; it is the soul’s soaring above the earth. Man is originally formed to delight in poetry and in music. These belong not only to the later and cultivated ages, but to the earlier and the rudest: they exist indeed wherever man is found. It is, alas, too true that both music and poetry have been abused for purposes of evil: that they have, syren-like, seduced unwary souls to quaff the cup of guiltiest folly: and that with the song and the dance thoughtless multitudes have crowded the broad road, and have gone gayly to

destruction. But the connection between poetry and religion is natural and divinely appointed: nor is music ever so sweet as when the praises of God are upon mortal lips and man imitates the lark, which pours out its melody as it rises towards the sun. The songs of the church of God, we may easily judge, belong to her whole history. Even though we give no credit to the Jewish tradition that the xcii. Psalm was written by Adam; we may believe that sacred praise was among the earliest compositions: for rhetoricians affirm the “seeming paradox, that poetry is more ancient than prose.”* There are but few songs preserved for us in the older books of the Bible. The song of Moses at the Red sea, Ex. xv. 1, to which Miriam and the women responded: and the song of Moses, as recorded in Deut. xxxii., are elegant examples of the ancient psalmody: besides which, record is made of a song by the princes of the congregation in Num. xxi. 17. But of the songs of Moses we have no remains so well known in the church and so suited to her perpetual worship, as the xc. Psalm.

There is something deeply interesting in the reflection that we may join our voices in the exalted strains that have been sung for centuries by the believing people of our God. The church of God is for all ages, like the generation whom Moses led, a peculiar people passing through a wilderness on

* Blair's Rhetoric, Lecture vi.

their way to the promised land; and this long train of pilgrims, not for forty years only, but for more than as many centuries, having Israel's sad experiences of sins and fears and judgments, have had also Israel's guiding pillar in a watchful Providence; Israel's knowledge of a forbearing God; and Israel's manifold deliverances: and all the way along they have had Israel's prophets for their poets and choristers.

We may wonder that, in the arrangement of the book of Psalms, one written by Moses and which is perhaps the earliest of all the volume contains, should be the ninetieth in order. Perhaps the reason is that David was the most eminent of the Hebrew poets: his songs outnumbering all the rest put together: and these were written at a time when a more complete organization of the national worship made a collection more needful. Almost the entire collection before the ninetieth belong to David: the exceptions belong to Asaph, and he was perhaps of David's generation, Ps. l., lxxiii.—lxxxiii.: and to Solomon Ps. lxxii.: David's therefore are placed first and together: while from the ninetieth Psalm onward, the Psalms are miscellaneous, including some of David and many of other authors. Yet we cannot confidently affirm this theory. There may have been other poets of the name of Asaph beside the chief singer of David's time, (1 Chron. xv. 17, 19, xxv. 2, 2 Chron. xxix. 30:) and Psalms lxxiv. and lxxix., ascribed to

Asaph, seem evidently to belong to a later period.* However this all may be, this is one of the most remarkable Psalms in the collection. Few are the Bible readers who do not know its words by heart: and we can hardly think that any ear could hear its impressive lessons, and easily forget them. We know no composition that can more commend itself to man's attention, wherever man may be found: and no poet's pen ever traced the lines that deserve, better than this ancient lyric, to be called a PSALM OF LIFE. We cannot know how often and where, this sacred song has been sung by believing men. Sometimes it has sounded forth in the great congregation. It rang along the desert, near enough possibly to be echoed back from the cliffs of Mount Hor: and was repeated at the foot of Pisgah, after its author had been hidden in his unrevealed grave. Long afterwards the choir of Asaph, with the harp and organ, sent its melodies through Solomon's magnificent house: and even the harpless captives in Babylon could sing this Psalm when others were laid aside: and the later generations of the church under a better covenant, still find its teachings as suitable for them. And it is a psalm not only for public, but for social and private worship. Mortal men have read these words of Moses in the homes of affliction, never wanting in the earth from his day until now; they

* See Alexander on the Psalms, i. xiii., and on the Psalms mentioned.

have sung it by the open graves of their kindred: they have used it when musing solitude has borne its griefs to the closet of devotion. Songs seem indeed usually for rejoicing: prayers are for our dependence and to express our need. But these things are not so inconsistent but that prayer and praise may be joined in one utterance. Like many others of the Psalms this is also “*a prayer of Moses the man of God.*” There are tunes of a minor key, in which men utter the dolorous complaints of their wounded affections: poetry is for grief, as well as for joy: and music is the means of soothing and tranquilizing the heart, as truly as the expression of our joyful and happy emotions.

No Psalm in all the book so much belongs to all ages as this: yet may we find greater interest in it, as we consider the time of its composition, and enter, so far as we can, into the swelling emotions of the great lyrist. There can be scarcely any doubt that it was written during the wandering in the wilderness; perhaps near the close of the long judgments, that had wasted Israel, and scattered the bones of so many thousands from the Red Sea and Sinai to Hor and the Jordan. There was no man in the camp who would naturally be more affected by all these occurrences of the desert than their great leader. No one had a more intelligent and vivid acquaintance with the entire train of the history, over which his mind rapidly glances: none

better understood why so many judgments had fallen upon the unbelieving people: and certainly none was less personally accountable, for errors he had ever withstood, or for calamities whose severest strokes his prayers had often averted. To understand the Psalm, we may think both of his character and of his position. Let us think of this serious venerable man, looking over the camp of his people, just as the forty years drew near their close; and sending his thoughts backward over the desert wanderings and away to Sinai and Egypt, to the Red Sea and the Nile. Indeed for forty years longer than this, the desert had been his home, ever since he first forsook Egypt for Israel: and it was associated with his waiting upon God, as well as with his busy activities. Let us suppose the latest date for this sacred song: that the funeral rites have passed for Miriam and for Aaron; and that the lawgiver stands very near to his own departure. The chief object before his memory is the busy multitude which forty years since he had led forth by Divine command from the house of bondage. How well he can remember them all. We do not certainly know just when the age of man's life was reduced to its present measure of threescore years and ten. If Moses records a new fact, that then it first was and should thereafter be, his thoughts of the existing generation about him would be more deeply impressive. Forty years ago, when he himself was

already eighty, and when—a rare family—Miriam and Aaron were his seniors, Moses looked upon many venerable heads in the crowd that passed forth from Egypt. But these were all gone now. The voices that had sung in triumph at the Red Sea, and shouted their war cry against Amalek were chiefly silenced. The young had become men, and the old had disappeared. Forty years work great changes among any people: but a generation under the Divine displeasure, of which but two men should be allowed to exceed sixty, when they passed the Jordan, must have exhibited more than ordinary change, especially of aged men. Moses beheld around him, familiar faces indeed, but younger men; endeared to him as if they were his own children, so long had he taught them, and guided them, and prayed for them: but the fathers were gone. The prophet felt alone—as few men can—for so many early friends had fallen.

It is very remarkable to notice how exactly the themes of his meditation suit the sons of men in all ages. We do not purpose upon these pages, an exposition of the Psalm. But we may notice a few of its leading thoughts: none of them are new, but their weighty value forbids them to be trite. Here as much as anywhere in his writings, Moses appears a man like ourselves; and his eminence, in so many wonderful respects, but the better fits him to be our teacher and our poet.

We are here reminded of the shortness of time.

Though the writer himself was now venerable and aged, he has the same tale to tell that ever falls from human lips. As he looked back a hundred years, the whole period was like the hasty visions of a dream. It seemed but yesterday that he stood by Sinai and the Red Sea: and but a little further back he was a child playing in the palace halls of the Pharaohs. There is scarcely any thought of our mortal life that seems so hard to believe in advance, yet to which men invariably come as they grow older, than that time flies in human experience, more and more rapidly with each advancing year. When we were children, how long a month appeared: as we grow older, each last year is the shortest we have ever known. With all our promises, it is hardly true that age teaches us the better use of time: it will slip away in spite of us: and the further we go down the hill the faster we move. Moses stands now on the verge of sixscore. His hands are full of busy cares: and if time could weigh any man down with anxieties, Moses might be weary of life. But he is free from the natural infirmities which make the strength of aged men “labour and sorrow;” for his eye is not dim nor his natural force abated. Yet we find not here the source of his reflections upon the brevity of time. It is because time is unsatisfactory; has always been so; will always be so, that Moses thus speaks. This life is a dream. Every man finds it as Moses found it.

How could this psalm of life do less than tell us of the vanity of man! Moses speaks from the depths of a large experience of human affairs. How might he speak of man's beauty as the fading flower of the field! So every poet, Christian and Pagan, has sung,—

“Like leaves on trees the race of man is found,
Now green in youth, now withering on the ground,”

writes the Greek Homer: and long before him, the Hebrew Moses, “in the morning it flourisheth and groweth up, in the evening it is cut down and withereth.” It is an affecting reflection upon human life that men are elevated above their fellows and have a larger experience of what belongs to man, only to know mortal griefs the more thoroughly. In the scenes of the desert especially, Moses had seen almost every form of sorrow. Sometimes we are filled with heavy grief as we mourn the removal of useful and beloved men: or as our communities pass through some season of more than ordinary mortality: or as wasting war reverses the usual order of things, and calls parents to mourn the untimely fall of their manly sons. If even the heartless Xerxes wept at the thought that his vast army would so soon be gone, how might Moses, than whom no leader ever made more sacrifices, or showed more affection for his people, sing thus of that generation that had already disappeared as with a flood. Yet indeed

how many changes does every man see as he passes on in life: and what are our remembrances of early friends but as the visions of a dream.

How often are our dreams troubled and unsatisfactory. We see incongruous things, and they do not appear strange: we pursue eagerly some desired objects, but we are always baffled in attempting to reach them: and persons and scenes change about us constantly, we cannot tell how; indeed we scarcely notice that they do change, except as we recall the fleeting vision. Everything is unsubstantial and disappointing. Even so every wise pen writes of the dream of mortal life. Let us not judge that the life of Moses differed from our own, because he was so good, so wise, so eminent. He held large power in his hands while he was still among men: he has exerted a large influence upon all the later ages. But, in common with all these ancient prophets, Moses "was a man of like passions with us;" and he had as full experience of anxiety, care, and disappointment as falls to the lot of others. This life is a dream, when we make the best of it: and a life of piety is still a human life. The fulfilment of the Divine promises to believing men never means the fulfilment of their expectations. It is God's purpose that fulfils, God's wisdom that directs the life of man. It is the method of his providence to lead us "in ways we have not known." As he led not Israel by the nearest road out of Egypt: as discouragements lay

all along the desert, so indeed, like Bunyan's pilgrim, believers may know their path by the very marks that send others back from walking there. Moses knew the pilgrim's path; and had passed by the Slough of Despond, and through the heavy clouds that hang over the Valley of Humiliation. We know little of that early life which may have been partly spent in the follies of Egypt: but we well know that satisfaction sought in this direction is never found by any man; for the world always flatters but always lies. The youthful Moses may have tasted Egypt's wines; but dregs cover the bottom of the cup, and a serpent coils in secret there. He may have mingled in Egyptian dances: but these gay revelries are always hollow-hearted. He may have descended to more degrading vices; but then and ever, these only bring

“Vexation, disappointment and remorse.”

And none of these things have changed their nature from that day to this.

But—may we not confess it?—even in Israel, Moses met disappointment. Like his great father Abraham, he went out “not knowing whither he went.” His people knew not their Deliverer. Acts vii. 25. Forty years passed in Midian, were spent with many a bright vision disappointed. And what was his leadership in Israel, but to carry constantly in his arms an ungrateful people; to be turned back from the very banks of the Jordan by

their sins; to be provoked with their perverseness; to be filled with anxious prayers, called forth by their evils; and, his prayer for himself unheard, to die at last without entering the promised land.

But Moses was not ignorant of the true source of the mortality and vanity of man; the true secret of his disappointments in the orderings of a holy Providence. "The Bible, as an eminent interpreter has well said, throws the blame of death entirely on man himself."* Everything on earth bears the marks of the Divine displeasure against sin. A world of sin, a world in which the holiest men bear still about with them "a body of death," cannot but be a world of vexation and disappointment. Thoughts of sin and of our accountability are needful to explain the tangled perplexities of this world's affairs. The love of God may lay the rod of chastisement upon the ignorance and folly and sin of his believing people: or his wrath may smite presumptuous rebels in judgment: but this solution applies to either case, "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee." And secret sins, so secret that we ourselves do not discern them, are yet so clearly set in the light of his countenance, that our path is ordered by his justice to punish, or his mercy to correct us for iniquity. All our days we need, and receive, leadings that testify to God's unchanging righteousness.

A profound impression of the sinfulness of man

* Dr. J. A. Alexander on Psalm xc.

is the invariable result of a large experience in human affairs. It is usually thought that, because good men are unsuspecting, they know less than others of the depths of depravity around them: but it may well be considered that the hardening influence of sin itself upon the transgressor, makes him less affected by these things than those who both see and abhor sin. If we justly judge that Moses, during the wanderings of the desert, was more a man of God than those around him; was seldom an unbeliever; was but once an open transgressor, all this fits him the better to speak of sin in tones of grief. The more guilty, usually the more hardened, are the sons of men: and indifference to Divine teachings or Divine judgments can never be a mark of innocence. If we are not accustomed to look upon the frailty and vanity of our mortal life, and upon all these changes of human affairs, with the constant remembrance of man's sin and man's immortality and man's accountability, we have not learned the elements of true philosophy; and we need indeed to look upward with this prayer of Moses upon our lips, "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

Moses looks, and teaches us to look, away from time to eternity, from man to God. Christian preachers have taken the themes of older times, and variously argued of the "vanity of man apart from his immortality." Not only his transient stay upon the earth; but the constant disorders of

the world; the incessant contentions, individual and national; the maladies to which our flesh is heir; the endless round of labours that perish as they rise, and that seem so little fit to engage a thinking mind; and the grovelling distinctions of sensuality and ambition all prove how vain is mortal man.* And our short time, so little used, so many hours spent in indifference, so many in sleep, so many that we wish were gone; so many days of sickness, solicitude, misery; so many months of anxious war; so many tales of human sorrow: so many plans thwarted, so many friends lost, or worse than this, unworthy and unfaithful:† lead us to cry upward, “Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?” And thus it ever will be, while men go on seeking satisfaction where it is not to be found; fixing their affections on things of little value: poring over events that cannot be recalled; anticipating evils that never come; and laying plans which must be disconcerted.‡ How vain indeed is man, if he may not look away from earth? But truly, HE MAY. This alone comforts the noble psalmist in the wilderness: this is the great burden of this psalm of life. It rises to Him who only has life: it recognizes the immortality of man: it finds this solution of our mortal griefs, that man may find, that man has ever found a refuge in God. Thou—the ever-living One, possessing all the attri-

* R. Hall's Works, iii. 380.

† Dr. Spencer's Sermons, ii. 229.

‡ A. Fuller, ii. 365.

butes of God before man was, "hast been our dwelling-place in all generations." Let us not suppose that the psalmist has before his mind only the grand comparison between the brief, changeful life of man, and the immutable eternity of God. This alone is no consolation: the contrast is as great for a wicked, as for a good man. There are two great thoughts that belong to the prophet's meditations, and lead on to his closing petition: and these believers of every age may adopt as they sing his psalm of life.

First, Amidst all these changes of human affairs, the cause of God still lives and moves forward. The more wisely we study human affairs, the more profoundly may we be impressed with the insignificance of any one man, of any one generation in the great plans of God for the world. We often sing this psalm on our funeral occasions. We may sing it every day; for every day witnesses funerals and open graves: and yours or mine may be digged to-morrow. "Thou carriest them away as with a flood." If we have nine hundred millions of men upon the earth, and a generation passes away in thirty years, 80,000 human beings daily die. Moses at his great age must have seen three generations pass away. Even we, whose years are fewer, may consider how many of our own times have already preceded us to the eternal world. As in our experience one-half the human family die under twenty years of age, so in the ordinary progress of things,

every youth of twenty has already survived half of those who began life when he did: and every middle-aged person has outlived three-fourths of his contemporaries. But with all this mortality of man, God's plans move on. One grand scheme covers the world's history. The movement seems slow: things seem sometimes to go back: but God has time enough: and a thousand years with him are as a day. A generation is but a link in his chain; the work goes on: man's strong things grow weak, man's permanent things wax old, man's settled opinions vanish away: and the word and the kingdom of our God alone are sure.

Second, That individual generations and men may recognize their relation to the great work of God, and may find in the very changes of their affairs the evidences of a moral responsibility and a moral training looking forward to an eternal life. We have spoken of Moses as disappointed in his anticipations: as thwarted in many plans: as meeting many griefs: but we only say half, unless we recognize his entire acquiescence in these leadings of Divine wisdom; and know that he looked forward to the full portion of his highest hopes in the enjoyment of his God for ever. May not a man glory in the changes, griefs and disappointments of his earthly life, when he regards these as a wisely chosen discipline, ordered by the blessed God: when he clings more closely to the Divine service in spite of disappointed expectations: when

in hours of dejection he is still a believer in promises that cannot fail: and when he knows that God often sends sorrow as the forerunner of joy, and gives man a seed-time of tears before the harvest of rejoicing? “Weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning.”

Not only is man in vain; but we cannot understand the Divine workings for man, if we look not forward to our immortality. In what better posture then can man stand than to desire to urge forward the great plans of God: for what nobler thing can man pray, than that the beauty of the Lord our God may be upon us? Moses knew now that the sorrow of Israel would not be past, till he was laid in his grave. God’s work was upon the fathers in the wilderness: his glory would be upon the next generation as they entered Canaan. But the entire result would be to prosper the work in which he had spent his life. In the best sense, Moses was not a disappointed man: no true believer is. The way of life is checkered: things turn not out as we have anticipated: but His work carried on within us and carried on by us, is better governed than our wisest thoughts can forecast. Even days of darkness and tribulation have their wise designs: and if not for us, yet for a cause which we hold dearer than life, bright days shall follow gloomy: and the children shall see the glory of the church for longer years than the fathers have borne her toils.

Let us sing this psalm of life, not sorrowing that we move forward to death, since by faith in Death's great Conqueror we may look further on, to a glorious immortality. Not a single one of us can sing this psalm who may not reflect that possibly the largest half of his earthly life is already past: and what is possible to some is certain to many. More than half of life already gone! Every man who judges so, should seriously ask, "What have I thus far accomplished?" Are we ready to say with thousands that we would be unwilling to go back, and begin life again, if we must repeat all our errors, renew all our follies, and feel all our griefs, and have no opportunity for change or improvement? Many would gladly go back, if they could improve; few, if all must be as it has been. But either is impossible. As the past cannot be recalled, so neither can it be changed. Yet Divine forgiveness may be sought for its follies: and so much time already lost, in our wise and earnest looking forward to the future, is reason enough for wishing to lose no more.

But none of our reflections on these topics are wise, unless also they are prayerful. They who live in the presence of God, and who look up to his throne in humble devotion, can alone learn how to use their time on earth. "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." Men who lean to their own understandings never learn that true wisdom which God alone

teaches. And when the psalmist says, "Oh, satisfy us *early* with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days," he may design to recognize the excellence of youthful piety. How much of Israel's guilt in the desert belonged to an Egyptian education: and how different was the young generation, trained by Moses himself in these wanderings! Happiest they, who are earliest satisfied with the mercy of God. Few men die who do not leave many unfinished plans: but the life is not spent in vain, which prepares man for eternity.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MOSES AS A PROPHET.

THE great Hebrew lawgiver was not only a patriot, a statesman and a poet. He was eminently a PROPHET. We may perhaps be so accustomed to ascribe prophetic gifts to that great line of Hebrew teachers where Moses stands first in the order of time, that we may need to call our express attention to the unparalleled nature of their claims. In an important sense, the Hebrews are the only prophets the world can even pretend to have. We do not mean indeed that none but they have ever attempted to forecast coming events. But the professed auguries and prophecies of heathenism have ever been so isolated in themselves, so called forth by personal applications, and so limited in their range, that a Hottentot who sets up his hut of reeds, may better be called an architect beside the builder of St. Peter's, than a heathen vates be compared with a Hebrew prophet. And indeed if only these religious teachers have claimed to look forward to the far distant future, and have called for the faith of posterity upon the ground of their

fulfilled predictions, such claims are truly consistent only as they are connected with the leading doctrines of the Hebrew theology. The Bible is one book from Genesis to Revelation, as no separated writings have ever been in unison. If there is any doctrine that is inseparable from all these writings, it certainly is that which puts the world wholly under the government of its Creator; and this is the basis of the claims of which now we speak. Providence and prophecy, as taught in the Hebrew Scriptures are twin doctrines: neither of them is taught by other teachers as they are presented in the Bible; both are too high in conception to be of man's devising: both are of range too wide, and of energy too vast, to be under man's control; both are unfolded by the history of our race; and certainly this exalted order of prophecy could not exist without the Hebrew idea of Providence.

Put the earth under the partial rule—perhaps the clashing governments—of many gods; and prophecy becomes impossible. It is worthy of our notice that among the ancient heathen, prophecies were supposed to express the decrees of the Fates, which even the gods could not control: yet they had no just conceptions of such a government: they did not scruple to consult different oracles upon the same question, and to choose that which was best conformed to their wishes. We can easily judge that true oracles could not deliver clashing opinions. And we can easily decide that when One Infinite

Jehovah rules all things and all times, a wise fore-thought and an unerring control must belong to his government. This indeed alone makes prophecy possible. What is pre-arranged can be predicted. The Hebrew teachings of providence and prophecy are in entire harmony; and prediction without providence can rise no higher than conjecture.

Of all the prophets of the church of God whose predictions written by their own pens, have descended to us, Moses is the oldest. And we have no other predictions in the sacred volume that admit of plainer appeal to their evident accomplishment, so that even unlearned readers may be satisfied, than those given us by this first of inspired writers. The Bible is emphatically a popular book: the Scriptural writers, though they often teach matters of profound wisdom, never lose sight of the great design of teaching even the humble: and what is true of the great Master belongs to all these teachers. "The common people heard him gladly." No more popular prophecies—prophecies whose fulfilment may be sufficiently explained to convince thoughtful though unlearned men—are given in the Scriptures than those uttered by Moses, and those spoken by and concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. These two are not only the greatest of the Divine messengers: but in an important sense they stand at the beginning and at the end of God's revelations to man. The proof of genuineness in the whole Bible is involved essen-

tially in substantiating their claims. As Christ himself appeals to the testimony of the Old Testament predictions concerning him, an interesting field of study is placed before every thoughtful reader: and we may see proof that "holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." So we have our Lord's own predictions for the destruction of Jerusalem: and their wonderful fulfilment we may easily know. And the prophecies of Moses respecting the Jewish people give proof incontestable of his inspiration from on high. We shall confine our thoughts to these in the present chapter.

We have intimated that even common readers of the Bible have the means of verifying these prophecies to an extraordinary degree. We do not need to affirm, concerning these or any other prophecies, that every sentence can be evidently applied to its corresponding fulfilment in the later times. As we have spoken of providence as connected with prophecy, so may we add that man can comprehend the one much as he understands the other. In the rule of providence, it is not hard to recognize the Divine working in the general results of human history: he is impious who knows much of human annals and denies that God rules in them; and yet the wisest men are baffled in any attempt to show the exact bearing of every individual event upon the great issues manifestly providential. It is not hard to decide that the career

of Alexander the Great, and the universal dominion of the Romans prepared the way for the spread of Christianity: but many minor events in the history of these times cannot be exactly explained in their relation to the end thus reached. This is not strange. Rather, thus God always works. His providence cares for every living thing, and makes no mistakes in its most trifling allotments. Yet we mean not that man can point out the influence of every drought, or every storm upon the growing oak: that he can know the power of every joy, or every sorrow to frame his own life; or that he can analyze the strength imparted to his character by the checkered experience through all which every devout mind thoroughly recognizes Divine leadings. Plainly enough there is a Providence: yet all his footsteps we may not trace.

And just this way we expect to understand prophecy, whose relations to providence are so intimate. There are many plain fulfilments, as we compare the ancient Scriptures with the later unfoldings of history, so that every observer should see that the words of the prophets have been accomplished: there may be fulfilments to more intelligent minds, not so clearly understood by others: and we need not wonder if some things remain obscure for the perplexity of even the learned student. Comparing providence and prophecy, we may possess convincing proofs of affairs not thoroughly understood. There is a wide differ-

ence between a prediction that is evidently unfulfilled and one whose accomplishment we are unable exactly to trace. We do not believe that the negative of "no fulfilment" can be shown of a single word in all these ancient writings: certainly the affirmative of direct—may we not say, of indisputable—fulfilment, may be shown of so many, that every candid mind should recognize the authenticity and Divine authority of these writings of Moses. Only as taught of God could he, so far in advance, have written these wondrous predictions.

We have two singular preparations, which only the providence of God could secure, to enable us to reflect intelligently upon the prophecies of Moses respecting his own people.

The first is, that the Christian world is well acquainted with the Jewish people. It is now more than twenty-four centuries since the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of Solomon's temple by the king of Babylon; at which time the Jews were widely scattered over the world, and began the remarkable dispersions which have ever since brought them into so singular contact with the other nations. It is now eighteen centuries since the Romans destroyed the second temple, and the race was finally scattered. The history of man presents no more remarkable problem than the distinct preservation of the Jewish people, though scattered so long and so widely in the earth. When other nations are broken up and scat-

tered, they lose all traces of nationality; as a bucket of water poured into the Mississippi mingles with the turbid flood. The people of the United States are gathered from various nations, but no one can decide the original nationality of an American whose ancestors left Europe a century ago: usually all trace of descent, in features or speech, is lost in the first or second generation: and the children have no yearnings towards the countries from which their parents came. But the Jews are not like drops of water in the river: they are rather like the gulf-stream which remains a stream even while it crosses the ocean. Everybody knows the Jews: they have retained for centuries their striking peculiarities; they have resisted every possible influence that time could exert: and it seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that they are thus kept by the Great Ruler of all for some important purpose in his vast plans. The Jew, in all ages and in all lands, is a standing witness for a providence that can do extraordinary things, when these may best accomplish the Divine purposes.

The second singular aid to the study of these prophecies, providentially secured for us, is that the Jews themselves bear testimony to the volume in which these prophecies are contained. Augustine frequently urges the great advantage that belongs to Christians because the Jews everywhere exist and bear testimony to the genuineness of the Old Testament writings. He calls the Jews the

librarians of the Christians: and declares that their testimony is providentially afforded to a faith to which they are hostile. Everywhere the Jewish people have in their hands the Hebrew Scriptures: in these is written their destiny, all the more evidently true because the “veil is upon their faces;” and because, spiritually as well as literally, they read it backwards. It is impossible but that this book in their hands must be old enough to prove that these wonderful predictions are not the production of man. To found an argument for their truthfulness it would not be needful to assert more than this. Yet if this much can be established, no candid opposer would make further opposition. For if these writings are old enough to be true as prophecies, they cannot be false in their historical claims.

The testimony of the Jews to the historical truth of these records survives even the rationalism which so pervades their modern philosophy. Even in our own times the Hebrews in London have come ably forward* to vindicate the writings of their great lawgiver, and to expose the bold infidelity and shallow scholarship of an English bishop.

Having these old Hebrew writings in our hands, and the Jewish people living before our eyes, every intelligent man should form an opinion respecting the prophecies of their lawgiver, and their wonder-

* In the Jewish Chronicle and Hebrew Observer, the organ of the British Jews.

ful fulfilment. In reading over the address of Moses to Israel as written in the closing chapters of Deuteronomy, especially in chapters xxvii.-xxx., our attention is drawn to this singular expression of his concern for his people. It is not often that distinguished men take the opportunity of giving parting counsels to the people they have ruled in life. Two presidents of the United States—Washington and Jackson—have indeed put forth farewell addresses to the people: but their terms of office expired before their death, and thus gave them an opportunity, seldom embraced by life-long rulers. In his address, Moses shows a special care for the religious character of his people: fears lest they may depart from God: and uses earnest efforts to dissuade them from apostasy. While all this is fully consistent with the character and teachings of Moses, it elevates him above all other teachers of other nations; and cannot be reconciled with the want of veracity or virtue in him.

The general scope of his prophecy denounces the judgments of Jehovah upon the people, if they departed from his ways. The decline of nations is no uncommon thing: that Moses should fear such decline in the Hebrew people, is not of itself so remarkable: he had himself experience of their fickleness, and he well knew that the laws and institutions he gave, would be borne by no people for light or transient reasons. Yet fickle as the

Jews were during the lifetime of the lawgiver, the Hebrew commonwealth endured more than fifteen centuries, from the exodus to the final destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans; and as we have already said, the scattered tribes yet cherish the writings of Moses. To establish an empire so enduring is the singular eminence of the Hebrew lawgiver: to foresee its destruction by the people's departure from its principles, is the dignity of the Hebrew prophet: while the overwhelming proof that Divine wisdom speaks in him, is afforded in the exact correspondence between prophecy and history in so many striking particulars.

The prophecy describes the people by whom the destruction of the Hebrew state should be effected. They were to be a people of whom hitherto they had been ignorant; coming from the ends of the earth; of an unknown language; of a fierce countenance; swift as the eagle; and cruel in their warfare.

These particulars may somewhat agree with other enemies who came against the Jews; but they more plainly belong to the Romans, who were the final conquerors of the Hebrews; and by whom they were scattered in that dispersion which lasts to this day. Rome was founded B. C. 753, that is, seven centuries after the death of Moses: and it was a thousand years after his times before the Jews could have much knowledge of the Romans. The languages of Europe so differ from the oriental

tongues, that the prophet may well describe them as a people whose language they should not understand. They were not to be a neighbouring people: but were to come from the ends of the earth. Titus Vespasian, who besieged and took Jerusalem and overthrew the Jewish commonwealth, had been a warrior in distant Britain before he was called to command in Judea. As the standard of the Romans was an eagle, the prophet seems to refer even to this, in his description of the coming foe. The sternness of the Roman character, and the fierce cruelty of this particular war, are distinctly declared. Josephus declares that in Galilee the Romans killed whoever was capable of fighting; filled the country with fire and blood: and exempted it from no calamity or misery, Book iii., ch. iv.: that they slew all the youth in Gadara, having indeed no mercy on any age; and in Jotapata they “spared none nor pitied any,” ch. vii.: and though Titus desired to spare the effusion of blood, the soldiers could not be restrained, but killed till they grew weary of slaughter. vi., ch. ix.

The prophet describes the kind of warfare which should complete the Jewish destruction. When Moses wrote, his people dwelt in tents; they held no cities whatever; nor did David take Jerusalem until four hundred years after the death of Moses. And scarcely any ancient city was so remarkably strong, by nature and by art, as Jerusalem. Its great strength of position and of bulwarks is de-

scribed at length by Josephus, and spoken of by the Roman historian, Tacitus.* The account of Tacitus breaks suddenly off before narrating the capture of the city: but all he says directly supports the history of Josephus. Moses says they should have high and fenced walls: Tacitus says the fortifications on the hill-sides were sixty feet high, and one hundred and twenty in the valleys, presenting a spectacle altogether astonishing. Against these the Romans advanced with banks and military engines on a gigantic scale.

In this remarkable chapter, the prophet also declares that unparalleled miseries should come upon the Jews in this final siege. The accounts given by Josephus of the famine that reigned in the city are unspeakably dreadful. It is explicitly said that a mother of more than ordinary tenderness should eat the flesh of her own child. Among no people would such an occurrence be less likely than among the Hebrews. Their laws and prejudices respecting food were strict; they would endure great privations before resorting to an extremity so dreadful: and such a particular no prophet would venture to declare but from a real foresight. Yet "perhaps the history of all other nations on earth put together do not contain so many well authenticated instances of this most horrid effect of desperate hunger, as are found in that of the Jews, according to this most extraordinary predi-

* History, Book v., ch. xi. xii.

tion of their celebrated lawgiver."* In the siege of Samaria by the Syrians, the sacred writers record an instance. 2 Kings vi. 29. So in the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the like seems to have occurred. Jer. xix. 9, Lam. iv. 10. But Josephus records one of a dreadful atrocity: perhaps none more shocking ever found record in the annals of the race.

In speaking of these terrible days in Jerusalem only a generation before their occurrence, a greater prophet than Moses declared that no such days of tribulation ever had occurred, or ever would again. And we, who read these narrations of Josephus as an eye-witness, may well believe, or at least hope, that the horrors of that time were indeed unparalleled in all the ages. God had promised that the Jews should not be molested by their enemies at any time of their feasts, Ex. xxxiv. 24; and they never were, till they forsook him. When the Romans besieged the city, it was the season of Passover: the city therefore was full of people: and their disasters multiplied from these great numbers. Bitter factions divided and exhausted their strength. Death reigned in fearful forms. They slew each other, and were slain by the enemy: famine and sickness cut down their myriads: multitudes lay unburied and added to the horrors: the wretched deserters to the Romans were crucified till the soldiers could find no more wood for crosses,

* Dr. T. Scott.

and no places for the crosses to stand: and though the siege lasted but four months, Josephus says that 1,100,000 persons perished in it.

But the fearful calamities foretold by Moses for the Jewish people extend to far later times in their apostasy from the God of Abraham. He says that their plagues should be wonderful and of long continuance: that they should be scattered among all people, from one end of the earth to the other; that they should be sold in bondage till no one should buy: that they should find no ease, no rest, no assurance of life; and that they should be a proverb and by word among all nations. A later prophet declares that God would make a “full end” of their enemies. Jer. xxx. 11, xlvi. 28. And so he has. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Macedonia and Rome: no such nations exist. So have the tides of revolution and foreign invasion rolled over these lands, that though Athens and Rome exist to-day, the dwellers there are not Greeks and Romans, in half so true a sense as the scattered tribes of Israel, without home or country, remain Jews to this very hour. We need not enlarge upon the obvious fulfilment of the words of Moses; the simple reading of them is enough. As he predicted, thirty-three hundred years ago, this people are now scattered among the nations; they are a by-word and a reproach; they are an astonishment to all that behold. We have nothing like this in the world. There is indeed a vagabond race of Gypsies, that ~~for~~ the

past four centuries have been a nuisance in Europe, maintaining a separate existence through their very degradation. But the Jewish race is as unlike the Gypsies as possible.

No chapter of human history can compare with the sufferings of the Hebrew people: we may find it hard to believe that men could ever oppress their fellows as the Jews have been maltreated; it is impossible that human sagacity could anticipate such sufferings for any people, one century, not to say twenty, in advance. Yet in the brief, significant words of Moses, how evidently were they forewarned! Josephus says that 97,000 were sold for slaves after the fall of their city; the markets of Rome were glutted till purchasers failed; the amphitheatres were filled with those that were compelled to fight with wild beasts; and thousands were doomed to degrading and unwholesome employments. We cannot pretend to follow their history. After furious insurrections and bloody persecutions, the spirit of the people was so broken, that their leaders forbade any further rebellions. Jerusalem became forbidden ground, as indeed it still is, though not now so absolutely. Judea was desolate. The sojourning of the Jews thenceforward was all abroad; and they mingle with the various revolutions of our restless humanity from that time onward. Temporarily courted at times, they have had no long repose. If over a million perished in the first century at the siege of

Jerusalem, half a million more were slain by a Roman emperor in the second: in the fourth the Christian emperors persecuted them: in the fifth the Persians, in the sixth the Goths, in the seventh the Mohammedans, in the eighth the Byzantines kept up the wretched succession. And in more recent times humanity may shudder to relate their sufferings in modern Europe. In the feudal ages they were the prey of lawless barons; they were robbed, and tortured, and sold as serfs; and monstrous trials, savage butcheries and cruel mockeries by the crusaders make up their gloomy history. A frightful picture indeed belongs to their annals in the middle ages.

It would be an easy thing to cite numerous instances of the unrelenting cruelties this unhappy people have suffered in Europe. "They were spoiled evermore. Their substance and their treasure were given to the spoil without price." Their children have been often taken from them and given to others. In England they have been again and again wilfully massacred: five hundred of them killed each other at York in 1190, rather than surrender to implacable foes; even Magna Charta legalized injustice towards them; and in 1290 they were expelled from the kingdom. When the black plague occurred in Europe in the fourteenth century, the Jews were charged with poisoning the wells, and hundreds of them were burned in the public squares, or burned themselves in their synagogues

out of despair. They have been seven times expelled from France: and indeed almost every European country has at one time or other expelled them.

We may dwell briefly on one page of their expulsions. The Jews in Spain, in the close of the fifteenth century, became the special objects of hatred to the people of Castile, excited to this by their fanatical preachers. As usual, robbery and massacre were practised upon them: and thousands attempted to save their lives and fortunes by pretended conversions. One Dominican preacher is said to have converted 35,000 Jews. They intermarried with almost all the noble families of the kingdom; yet their conversions were not esteemed sincere. Charges were made of their contempt and mockery of the Catholic worship; and of the secret indulgence of Jewish rites. When the outcry against them became general, that terrible tribunal, the Spanish inquisition, was originated to extirpate the Jewish race. But all severity failed to effect anything, and the sovereigns—Ferdinand and Isabella—determined to banish the entire Jewish population from their dominions. This was half a year before the discovery of America by Columbus: and save a partial welcome by the Moors of Africa, no asylum was open for the wretched exiles. Eighty thousand Jews dearly purchased the privilege of passing through Portugal: but on leaving that kingdom all their children under fourteen years of age were

taken from them. The miserable exiles found refuge wherever they could. It is variously estimated that from 160,000, to 800,000 souls were thus driven from Spain—a loss of industry and resources never recovered by that proud realm to the present hour. To the Jews the whole movement was distressing and disastrous. Many perished, by exposure, shipwreck, famine and disease. Some historians judge that not one-fifth part of them survived the horrors of this forced exile. They also communicated diseases at several points where they touched: leaving a plague at Genoa; sweeping off 20,000 by an infection at Naples; and spreading devastation over the whole Italian peninsula.*

Those who desire to know more fully how these fearful predictions have found their fulfilment upon that wretched people, can easily find information more than can be here presented. Even our own century testifies to their miseries. In 1848 just before the election of Louis Napoleon as president of the French republic, a persecution by popular violence broke out against them, on the upper part of the Rhine; and many were driven from France into Switzerland.† And as the church of Rome has always held them among the worst of heretics, their children have often been taken from them and baptized: and the instance of a boy named

* Prescott's *Ferdinand and Isabella*.

† Alison's *Europe*, viii. 333.

Mortara was specially notorious in 1858. And as these paragraphs are written,* a letter from an oppressed Jew in Rome appears in our public prints, taken from the Paris *Opinion Nationale*, in which the writer declares their heavy miseries under the Papal government. “How and to whom, are we to complain? We are warned that on the slightest remonstrance from us, some discharged servant, or somebody with whom we may have had dealings, will be found to declare that they have baptized our children; and then our own flesh and blood, the soul of our life, the hope of our redemption, will be taken away from us for ever. The house of Jacob suffered less in Egypt than we do in Rome. Pharaoh contented himself with killing the first-born: he did not keep them and bring them up to be the cruel enemies of Israel. The law and the inquisition detain us here, and will not release their wretched prey. Where is the new Moses?”

Now let it be remembered that these prophecies of Moses respecting the Jews, do not stand alone. We have spoken only of his teachings: they are distinct, abundant, and free from all ambiguity: and history attests their fulfilment: but a line of prophets—every man a Hebrew—may assure us of similar declarations, that have been as wonderfully accomplished. These things have been so frequently insisted upon by Christian writers that,

* February, 1863.

except wilfully, no man can plead ignorance of such prophecies and their accomplishment. Dr. Keith's chapters are accessible in many editions. They refer to predictions both concerning the Jews and Judea. We do not wish unduly to swell the present chapter; but cannot refrain from taking from his pages a single instance.

In Deut. xxix. 22-25, Moses writes, "The generation to come of your children and the stranger that shall come from a far land, shall say, when they see the plagues of that land, Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land? What meaneth the heat of this great anger." Thirty centuries after Moses, a French infidel travelled in those Eastern lands, and wrote a book still to be found in the hands of unbelievers among ourselves. He was a stranger from a far land: he had no idea of testifying to the truth of the prophecies: yet he was so affected by the desolations of Judea, that his words answer exactly the predictions of Moses. "Good God," exclaims Volney, "from whence proceed such melancholy revolutions? From what cause is the fortune of these countries so strikingly changed? Why are so many cities destroyed? Why is not that ancient population reproduced and perpetuated?" "I wandered over the country. I traversed the provinces. I enumerated the kingdoms of Damascus and Idumea, of Jerusalem and Samaria. This Syria, said I to myself, now almost depopulated, then contained a

hundred flourishing cities, and abounded with towns, villages, and hamlets. What is become of so many productions of the hands of man? What is become of these ages of abundance and of life?"*

It seems impossible to imagine any historic proof that could descend through the long lapse of thirty centuries and be placed more fully before the eyes of Bible readers than that which assures us that these wonderful predictions concerning the Jews were indeed spoken by the wisdom of God. We have already suggested that if these prophecies are true in fact, it is unreasonable to dispute their authority as belonging to Moses: but the very latest possible date that could be assigned to them, would scarcely detract from the overwhelming proof of their Divine origin. The Roman people decreed a triumphal arch to Titus, because he took Jerusalem: and every visitor to Rome may see it still standing there, not now entirely complete. But we have a monument before our eyes, which only the God of providence could erect, to attest the truthfulness of his own prophecies. That the Jews should so retain their attachment to Judea though their fathers have not dwelt there for ages; that they should keep so distinct from other nations, without land, rulers, or laws of their own: that they should hold still in their possession the books in which these amazing declarations are made, and maintain still that they are the writings of Moses;

* Volney's Ruins, ch. ii. p. 8. In Keith,

that they should be scattered into every land, so that every man knows the Jew: all these things, to name no more, make that people themselves a monument to testify of these sacred writings. The most stately pyramid, erected on the most frequented spot, to commemorate the most important event, could not be so enduring, so intelligible, so widely known to man, as this grand memorial of providence and prophecy, that helps to authenticate the sacred volume.

It adds greatly to the force of these prophecies, considered as establishing the Divine mission of Moses, that they declare things so striking and particular, and especially so out of the ordinary course of human affairs. If we had other examples of exiled nations still retaining their national peculiarities; if any people besides had ever so brought on them the contempt and persecution of other nations; if these utter desolations were not evidently the judgments of a God whose arm can smite in all the earth for his broken covenant; if their miserable complaints did not still reiterate their acknowledgment of sins as causing all their troubles; if we did not know of the hope still indulged that an appointed end shall come to all these miseries; and if the Christian church did not share this hope, and look forward to a better restoration than is wished for or dreamed of, Rom. xi. 26, among the rejected sons of Jacob, the proof might seem less clear of prophetic inspiration. Even then, we could not believe

that the secrets of the distant future could so lie open to any mortal mind; or that political sagacity could forecast these events one single generation in advance. It has been well said that whole volumes of Christian evidences lie in this single word—**A JEW**. The veil of blindness is upon Israel that they know not the voices of their own prophets: but not less are other men blind, who refuse to recognize that the predictions of Moses give proof indisputable of his Divine commission. For, we repeat, providence and prophecy are alike incapable of being wielded by man: they stretch over spaces too vast, they control things too numerous and too complicated, they need too many independent witnesses; and it is impossible that their united testimony to Moses can be false. Among merely mortal men, the Hebrew lawgiver is the greatest of prophets.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MOSES AS A THEOLOGIAN.

A VOLUME intelligently recording the history of human opinions, especially upon the great subject of religion, would be of surpassing interest and value, as compared with any book ever written by man. It is among the improvements of modern times, that our historians have learned to trace the progress of thought, and have marked the eras of advancement in human ideas. The science of theology, not less than other sciences, has received the benefit of these methods of investigation; and every period of church history, ever since the completion of the canon of Scripture, has given its aid, in one form or another, to express and define the accurate statements of theological truth. So the various centuries, that have elapsed since the days of the apostles, are sometimes designated by the controversies that belonged to them, and the important teachings they have settled.

Yet to say these things, is not the same as to declare that the theology of the church of God is progressive, in the same sense that this term may

be used of other sciences. We recognize the advancing knowledge of the people of God, not only as we compare the earlier and the later dispensations, Matt. xi. 11, Luke x. 23, 24; not only as we see more clearly in Paul's teachings than in those of Moses: but also as we read Christian evidences more clearly in Grotius than in Origen, in Paley than in Grotius;* as we see the doctrine of the trinity better defined after the Arian and Socinian controversies; as we better understand the doctrine of justification by faith since its discussion by the Reformers; and as providence gradually unfolds the plans of the Divine mind, obscurely given us on the scroll of prophecy. Dan. xii. 8, 10, Rev. i. 3. We do not anticipate additions to religious truth, corresponding to the discoveries which the human mind may make in natural science. Rather, the teachings in which the church of God rejoices are REVEALED: this is their special characteristic; to these authoritative teachings man may not add a word, Rev. xxii. 18: and so there is a sense in which the Christian religion was complete in all its teachings when the New Testament pages were fully written. And this is the faith of the church, that "the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience." What they teach, explicitly, or by good and legitimate consequence, we are to believe: and the

* Douglas' Truths in Religion, 53.

reasonings of man and the developments of providence are useful in religious teachings only as they throw light upon the Bible, and help us to understand the things therein already written.

But is there not also a sense in which the earliest writings of the church of God are as perfect in their religious teachings as the whole Bible; have at least a marvellous completeness, which marks Moses as the teacher of the whole church, and stamps the impress of Divine original upon his revelations? For this is a paradox, characteristic of Divine works, that, needing something for their perfection, they already possess a certain perfectness as they come from His hands.

We illustrate this by referring to a beautiful thought of the great teacher of modern philosophy, that nature does not proceed as a statuary in forming a statue, completing one member before another is begun: she throws out altogether and at once the whole system of every being, and the *rudiments of all the parts*. Upon which Bolingbroke* remarks, “There is not a deeper nor a finer observation in all my Lord Bacon’s works.” God’s works do not need new parts: they need development. A tree is as perfect in the first months of its existence as ever: root, trunk, bark, branches, leaves, all are there, and the nature that determines the fruit and its quality. A child is a complete human being at his birth: limbs, head, heart, lungs,

* Works ii. 393, quoted in Douglas’ Truths in Religion, 81, 210.

mind, all are there. He needs growth, strength, development: and these are gained in due proportion. The change from a child to a man is in some things as remarkable as the creation of new capacities or new faculties: and we cannot tell in advance how this mental, physical, and moral growth may be modified. Yet nobody questions that advancement is made here by the development of powers possessed, but scarcely, if at all, discerned in childhood. It is thus with these Divine teachings. The psalmist could write, "The law of the Lord is **PERFECT**," Ps. xix. 7; though indeed many clearer teachings were yet to be given long after his day; for clearer things, not different, belong to the later prophets; and even Moses belongs to the "school" of Christ. John i. 45, v. 46.

We design in this chapter to review the religious teachings given to us in the writings of Moses, as they might be arranged in a modern system of theology, that we may show their wonderful completeness and their essential agreement with the present faith of the church of God. As we might anticipate in a teacher commissioned from on high, he declares certain grand principles so clearly that nothing has been added even by later prophets; he foreshadows other principles so that we can recognize that subsequent teachings are but the needful development of what he had already taught; and he says not a word that is not in entire harmony with the full teachings of even New Testa-

ment times. As our aim is popular instruction, we may follow the order of the Westminster Catechism so far as we speak of systematic divinity.

We cannot understand Moses at all except as we affirm man's need of Divine revelation. Twenty-five centuries of human experience had already shown how prone our race is to forget God, when he came with the credentials of a teacher of religion, John iii. 2; and authoritatively declared the faith and the duty of man. And of his writings we ourselves may judge, for they have ever since remained as we now have them. He teaches us that God leaves not man without a rule of faith and obedience.

The most striking superiority of the Hebrew Scriptures over all teachings professedly religious, is in what they reveal concerning GOD HIMSELF. Unquestionably no more important teachings can be given to man than those that reveal God, (*supra*, vol. ii. ch. x.;) and nothing is more astonishing in the Bible than its conceptions of his being and character, grand, original, simple and harmonious; contrasting with the darkness of Paganism more wonderfully than the sun with the old chaos. The teachings of Moses reveal the same God whose glory shines in all the volume. We may notice the very first line in the Bible: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Just seven words are used in the original language: the Hebrews used *seven* as the number of perfection;

and here is an excellence of revelation, upon the noblest of all topics, far beyond the searchings of earth's wisest philosophers. Profound indeed are the teachings of this single line, the first dictation of God's inspiring Spirit. It denies Atheism,* Polytheism, Materialism, Pantheism, Fatalism and Naturalism, all in one breath. For it teaches that there is a God: one God; the Creator of matter; himself existing before all other existences, and, of course, apart from them; himself freely originating a new order of things: and taking pleasure in arranging the works of his power. His existence, in the beginning; his eternity, as before all things; his omnipotence, creating all things; his wisdom, ordering and arranging all; his goodness, having neither motive nor capacity for evil, and filling the earth with blessings: are all implied in the first chapter of Mosaic teachings. No sentence ever penned has taught man so much concerning God, as the first line of the Bible: the errors of the world seem all refuted in a single phrase; speak this amidst the babbling confusions of earth-born philosophers, and it is like the first voice that broke the gloom of chaos. In the moral world, God speaks, and there is light.

The teachings of Moses concerning the being and attributes of the one, everlasting God are wonderfully complete. If language is used (in anthropomorphism) which men have sometimes misappre-

* Prof. Murphy, of Belfast.

hended, yet the sacred word itself guards us against such misconceptions. The spiritual nature of the Divine Being, who cannot be seen, Deut. iv. 15, who must not be represented by visible forms, Ex. xx. 4, supra, vol. ii. 103; and who fills heaven and earth, Deut. iv. 39, xxxiii. 26, is clearly made known: while his self-existence, Ex. iii. 14, his eternity, Gen. xxi. 33, Deut. xxxiii. 27, Ps. xc. 2; his unchangeableness, Num. xxiii. 19; his supremacy and sovereignty, Gen. xiv. 18–22, Num. xxiv. 16; his omniscience, Gen. vi. 5, xxxix. 9: his omnipresence, Ex. xx. 24; his omnipotence, Gen. xvii. 1, xviii. 14, Deut. xxxii. 39; his justice and holiness, Gen. xviii. 25, Ex. ix. 27, xv. 11, xxxiv. 7, Lev. xx. 3, Deut. x. 17; his faithfulness, truth and goodness, Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7, Deut. vii. 9, xxxii. 4; his kindness, Gen. xxiv. 12, mercy and long-suffering, Gen. vi. 3, xxxii. 10, Ex. xxxiv. 6, all are as plainly taught in the writings of Moses as in any of the later prophets. Even the doctrine of the Trinity has its germs, to say the least, in his teachings: for the plural form of the Divine name* joined to a verb in the singular number; and the distinct recognition of the Divine Spirit, Gen. i. 2, vi. 3, Num. xxiv. 2, &c., and of the Divine character of him who reveals the Godhead, (above, ii. 120, 121,) Ex. xxiii. 21, xxxiii. 12–15, who yet is distinguished from the Father, Gen. xix. 24, can be reconciled with nothing less than the doctrine which the New

* Witsius cites an ancient Jewish opinion that *Elohim*, as applied to a bench of judges, Ps. lxxxii. 1, implies three. *De Syned.* Heb. § ii.

Testament writers have more clearly revealed, and still later controversies have more logically defined.

The eternal purposes of God are not only implied in his nature as described by Moses, in the promises and prophecies which his writings contain, and in direct affirmations here given, Ex. ix. 16, Deut. xxxii. 8; but necessarily pertain to the works of creation and providence here ascribed solely to him. He alone made the worlds: created man, in soul and body, Gen. ii. 7, Num. xvi. 22: created also the angels, Gen. xviii. 2, xix. 1. That his providence rules over all, is plainly taught: nor do any inspired teachings open before us a brighter page of providence, or exhibit its influence as extending to more minute and delightful particulars, than the earliest book of the Bible gives us in the history of Joseph. Following the creation of man in the holy image of God, we have the record of Divine dealings with him, involving the grand principles of covenant representation and imputation, so characteristic of the entire Bible. Moses gives us our only satisfactory account of the fall of our race to sin; declares our entire ruin by the fall of the first man; shows that the fatal effects of that original transgression extend to all his children, who enter the world in sorrow, are doomed to toil, and reap thorns from the ground that is cursed for sin's sake: and unfolds a history which proves that every thought of man is evil. Gen. vi. 5.

Yet Moses stands the leader of a chosen people

and reveals God's purposes of mercy. Even while our fallen parents still lingered in paradise, they received the glad tidings of a Redeemer; able to save, yet to be born of a woman. Abraham looked forward to the days of Christ, and Moses wrote of him. If the Person of the Redeemer was not fully understood, yet things were said of the whole scheme of salvation that stood as sacred enigmas, till the later teachings explained to believers what they really implied. The sacrificial altar taught vicarious sufferings, atonement, remission by blood; indeed all the "rudiments" of Christ's priestly office. The covenant of grace belonged as truly to them as to us; to them was the gospel preached, as early as the days of Enoch, Jude 14; and the call of Divine grace, Gen. xii. 1, the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, Gen. vi. 3, Deut. x. 16, and the adoption and privileges of sonship, Ex. iv. 22, were theirs as truly as ours. If the revelation of a future life has been denied to the teachings of Moses, yet this unjustly: for even the paradox of Bishop Warburton takes this as the basis of his reasonings, that the patriarchs knew, and Moses must have known the immortality of man:*

* Divine Legation, Book v. § v.

soul, and indeed of the body, is implied in Enoch's translation: the judgment to come he expressly affirmed. Jude 15. Nor should we omit to say, that the design of the Messiah's kingdom to rule in all the earth, which seemed a mystery till the very days of Paul, Eph. iii. 5, 6, is yet by Paul himself explained as resting on the promise to Abraham, "In thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed." Gen. xxii. 18, Gal. iii. 8.

We need spend less time in proving that the teachings of Moses touching the law of God are the same as those given us in all the Bible. Let it not be thought remarkable that even the greatest of all teachers—our Lord Jesus Christ himself—adds nothing to the law as "given by Moses." This arises from the original excellence of the law. That may well be a perfect summary of law, incapable of improvement, which the Divine finger wrote on the tables of Sinai. Indeed the moral law is older than Moses. Given to man at his creation, every principle and precept expressed in the Decalogue may be gathered from the book of Genesis. The summary of the law Moses also gives; and he plainly expresses its controlling spirit of love. Deut. vi. 5. The principles of this law, Christ Jesus did not change; its precepts, he explained and enforced; its sanctions, he recognized; its permanence, he affirmed: and even in his own most original and striking utterance, as found in the GOLDEN RULE, Matt. vii. 12, he himself confesses

that the originality is not in the principle he teaches, but simply in the terse expression of it. "For this is the law and the prophets." Moses is the lawgiver of the church of God.

The teachings of the church as demanding repentance and faith: as providing that these should spring from the use of appointed means; and as calling forth the activities of believing obedience, were then as they are now. Even sacramental services gave solemn interest to their early worship: and the same sacrifice of Christ and the same renewing power of the Holy Ghost were set forth in the sacramental ordinances which did "signify and seal and exhibit" to the early believers the benefits of the covenant of grace. The sacraments of the church have changed in form, not in substance, as we compare the New Testament and the Old.

If from these statements we turn to trace the power of such teachings, we may find that the casuistic or practical theology of the early church, not only harmonizes with the teachings of the later prophets, but is essentially the same with ours. If the necessities of the race have been the same ever since the fall, the religious experience of men, who belong to the same family, worship the same God, were bound by the same law, exercised a like faith, and looked for the same heaven, could scarcely be much unlike ours: men of later times have even expressed envy of their disadvantages, as demanding

and developing a bolder and nobler faith;* the providential guidance of Israel under the leadings of Moses, through the wilderness, from the Exodus to Canaan, was typical of their religious life and of our own: the tempters and the temptations, the fears and hopes, the afflictions and comforts, of earlier piety were as we also know these things: and the follies and the faults of believing men were like those that are still seen in the church, or if any suppose that like faults would not now be tolerated in the church visible, they may be looked at, as a wise man recalls the follies of childhood.

And what are the virtues and the graces of piety which find not examples, even illustrious, in the saints of whom the Mosaic writings speak? Abel, being dead, yet speaks of penitence: Enoch, in holy living, walked with God: Noah waited patiently in God's long-suffering; the faith of Abraham, the meekness of Moses, the courage of Joshua, the sincerity of Caleb, the zeal of Phinehas, are all illustrious as examples of pious temper: while the benevolence of Abraham, even towards his guilty neighbours, Gen. xviii. 23; the forgiveness of Joseph towards his cruel brethren; and the prayerfulness of Abraham and Jacob and Moses, are proofs enough that the same influences of God's grace have ever moulded the hearts of his people. And doubtless, but for the brevity of these ancient records, many similar teachings and examples could be given from the brethren whose footsteps we follow. Heb. vi. 12.

* Sir Thomas Browne.

This chapter might be greatly enlarged by showing the *negative* excellencies of the Mosaic theology—that he teaches none of the errors which abounded in the world: by unfolding the typical system which it is our privilege to understand better than did those to whom it was given: and by explaining his ceremonial institutions, which sustained the teachings of the gospel, as chaff is needful for the growing grain, though it may be cast away when the grain is ripe. It is not by denying the excellency of Mosaic teachings that we exalt the Christian dispensation. Paul's argument is, that if the early privileges were glorious, much more glorious are ours. 2 Cor. iii. 7–10. All we have said is no denial of the glory of Christ—in himself and in his teachings. The mature man has a nobler life than when he was a child. Christianity seems like a new church, “by reason of the glory that excelleth;”* yet in it the original plan of God's mercy is but more clearly developed. Thus the Divine hand is accustomed to work.

In some rather remarkable respects the teachings of Moses are fragmentary, like every man's remembrance of his own early life. How many principles do we hold, whose origin we know not. So Moses abruptly introduces even so important a service as sacrifice as already established upon his first mention of it, Gen. iv. 3; intimating, but not declaring its previous existence. iii. 21. So the

* See the previous chapter, ii. xi. p. 112, seq.

priesthood and tithes are recognized, though he says nothing of their origin: so many teachings and ordinances belong to earlier days than his own. All this we should expect to see in him. The church of God is older than her written teachings: her lifetime is the lifetime of fallen man; her principles imply the unity of the race in all the world, the essential identity of human necessities and interests, the gradual working forward of human affairs to a better position than man has yet held, and the coöperations of Divine grace and providence to bring this about. The advancement of the church of God, the illustration already used may aptly explain. There are great changes between the tiny sprout on Lebanon and the great cedar, the growth of ages. The majestic tree has not outgrown its nature: but because it has in itself the proof of its growth; because it gives irrefragable proof of a life of centuries, and has changed only as time and development would naturally change it; because we can easily distinguish between the natural growth of cedar life and all the trimmings and graftings of man, we refuse to believe that this tree owes its origin to the planting of a recent hand.

These thoughts upon the writings of Moses, may add to the evidence of Divine original in his teachings. For the church of God was too early established; has been brought in contact too continually with human history; bears too many marks of long

growth; has maintained the same principles with too great consistency; has covered too wide a field of space and time; has employed agencies too diverse in remarkable respects; has shown too constantly the same characteristics and tendencies; has been delivered and sustained by too many coöperations of powers which man could not command; and so has evidently been planned upon a scale too grand and holy, to allow the slightest room for conjecture that it is the growth of yesterday, or that we have here the “cunningly devised fables” of human wisdom. The church of God is a universe of herself: and this in a sphere far higher than that of the material worlds. The foundations and the whole history of the church give proofs of his authorship, not less than the evidence of his eternal power and Godhead in the “things that are seen.”

Moses is still our teacher: and the end of his conversation, as of all who have spoken unto us the word of God, is “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and to-day and for ever.” Heb. xiii. 7, 8.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF MOSES.

“By Nebo’s lonely mountain
On this side Jordan’s wave,
In a vale in the land of Moab,
There lies a lonely grave;
And no man dug that sepulchre,
And no man saw it e’er;
For the angels of God upturned the sod,
And he laid his servant there.”

IT is self-evident that the hand of Moses did not pen, in the book of Deuteronomy, the closing record concerning the lawgiver’s death. And the friends of the Bible may congratulate themselves that infidels have pointed to this as a sufficient proof that these entire writings either belong not to Moses, or have been altered since his death. We may certainly declare that if infidelity had any weighty, important objections to make against the evidences of revealed religion, we should hear much less of the trifling cavils that are so often urged, and that are so easily answered by the use of candour and common sense. We may easily judge in this case that this brief addition to a writing of Moses rather strengthens its evidences of authen-

ticity. For the book would not have been credited to Moses by a consent so universal notwithstanding these added words, if the proof had not been overwhelming: nor would such an addition have been received, except as made by a competent authority. The more fully we consider the subject, the more reasonable it seems, that a hand equally inspired with that of Moses added these things, perhaps as late as the days of Ezra. The Jews were exceedingly careful of their sacred books: the prophets of later times would have shown the error, if these words had been wrongfully added: above all, the greatest of prophets has given his sanction to the entire Old Testament as held by the Jews of his day. For among all the reproofs of Jewish errors so plainly spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ, we search in vain for a single charge that they had ever corrupted the sacred Scriptures, or given us any reason to withhold our faith from a single thing written in them.

The record given us of the death of Moses is a fitting close of his long, laborious and useful life. It exhibits him as highly favoured of Divine Providence: as we have before seen him in many of the changing scenes we have already considered. There were two things indeed which grieved Moses in these closing hours of his life: *first*, that he was not allowed to enter the land of promise: and *next*, that his own sin against God had wrought his exclusion. While God heard the prayers of Moses

as often as he plead for the sinning people, he refused to hear him, when he asked, "Let me go over and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain and Lebanon." This prayer for personal good was not granted. "Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter." To show that no eminence of service can be the ground of man's acceptance with God: perhaps also as a type of his own legal system, which could not "make the comers thereunto perfect," Heb. x. 1, Moses may not cross the Jordan, nor lead the people to their promised inheritance. Yet we have every reason to believe that Moses submissively acquiesced in the Divine will respecting him: and all his preparations to leave his people are marked with a dignity and calmness that greatly become the last days of such a man. We may well learn from such a scene as this.

There are several important reasons for regarding the death of Moses, in its time and circumstances, as showing in a high degree the favour of God towards him. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." The time when death occurs, the comforts and supports his people need in the trying hour, the influence exerted by their departure upon others, and all other matters connected with these closing scenes of earth, these opening scenes of heaven and glory, are ordered in infinite love by Him to whom the death of his people is precious.

Among the privileges belonging to the death of this great man we may name these.

1st. Moses had now attained a good old age, and wise reflection should have led him to judge that his death could not be far distant.

We are well aware indeed, that there is something in our human nature that prompts every man to postpone the time when he shall die. Men of the most venerable years seem to cling to life with a tenacity they did not show in earlier days; and though reason and sound judgment may decide that in the course of nature they cannot long abide upon earth, they cannot realize this. So an ancient Roman moralist writes, "No man is so old that he does not suppose he can live another year."* We know that Moses had his meditations upon the brevity of life. The xc. Psalm we have considered as the noblest and the most ancient psalm of life; and that for it alone, we might rank the Hebrew lawgiver among the eminent poets of our race. Moses might say, in the words of Jacob, that his few and evil years had not attained unto the days of the years of the life of his fathers: yet from this psalm we learn that the life of man had been reduced to three-score and ten years. If this had been earlier than his times, the age of the prophet was nearly double the ordinary term.

In a period of old age there are usually two things which make it less desirable that the life of

* Cicero De Senectute, § vii.

a man should be prolonged. It was indeed a comfort to Moses that both these things were remarkably wanting in his case: and their very absence would naturally prompt him to wish that his life might be still continued. First, The failing strength and the growing infirmities of an old man, described by Moses himself as labour and sorrow, make life less desirable. And next, when men live to be very aged, they usually outlive their engagements and acquaintances; and surrounded by a new generation, by new habits and manners, they feel lost and desolate, like men in a foreign and uncongenial land.

Now although it was true of Moses, as much perhaps as of any man that ever lived, that he had outlived the friends and companions of his early days, yet in a very remarkable degree, his death seemed like the death of a man in the full vigour of his years, with most important plans unaccomplished, and in the very midst of influence and usefulness. We may say of this man that he almost completely outlived three entire circles of friends; and was now living surrounded by the fourth, in higher esteem and with busier hands than ever. The first forty years of his life he passed in Egypt, an inmate of the king's palace: but the friends he left when he first forsook Egypt, had doubtless already chiefly disappeared at the time of his return. In the land of Midian he began life again, but the friends of that time were no

longer around him. The most eventful forty years of his life were now just past. Two-score years ago he was the leader of Israel through the Red Sea and to the foot of Sinai. But where were now the thronging multitudes that gathered about the appointed Passover in Egypt, and that passed forth in triumph upon the pre-appointed night, Ex. xii. 41, from the land of the oppressor? The voices that had swelled the song of triumph with Miriam, and the shout of rebellion with Korah; the skilful hands that had wrought the tabernacle, and the strong arms that had fought with Amalek; these were silent and powerless in death. A third time had Moses outlived his generation. During the past forty years he had seen them fall in the wilderness, with every variety that can mark the final scene of man's mortal history: and now, with his mind full of remembrances of those who had been there and had gone, he looked over a new camp and a new people. A few gray heads only, besides his own, were seen in the camp; and even Caleb and Joshua were young men compared with Moses.

Yet Moses teaches us how to grow old. Growing infirmities men cannot indeed throw off, yet no man better retains his faculties than he who uses them as long and as vigorously as he can. The vigorous mind and the unabated strength of Moses enabled him still to discharge his official duties: and he could look upon this fourth generation, like

a man who had kept his circle of friends still full and unbroken by constant mingling with the changing world. Though melancholy thoughts would sometimes come upon the patriarch of six-score, as he recalled many a beloved face to be seen no more by the tabernacle and in the camp: yet these new faces were all familiar. They were the faces of his pupils; of his children, we may say; and the piety of this younger race made the ties more tender and dear, that bound them to each other. No wonder Moses longed to remain yet a while longer with this people, never more worthy of his love than now: no wonder he greatly desired to finish the work he had begun, and to lead them fully into Canaan.

We might very properly dwell upon the religious character of Moses as a fitting preparative for that final earthly change to which he now pressed forward. We have already thought of his early choice of piety to the rejection of Egyptian pleasures. It might be greatly profitable, if we could carefully and accurately trace the progress of the Divine life in the soul of Moses, from the happy day when he chose affliction with the people of God, to this sublime close of his career on Pisgah. Without attempting this, we may affirm that no sight on earth should more attract our attention, win our respect, and secure our imitation than an old age of piety. See the venerable Moses, loving his people more tenderly, warning them more earnestly, blessing

them more abundantly, and toiling for them more diligently, the nearer he approaches the end! What a ripening of grace we seem to see in him. No such counsels drop from his lips in earlier years. So have we seen aged believers approach the grave, with a gradual and delightful softening of characteristic asperities, which early days had shown: with a mellow ripeness of views and feelings and expressions; and with warmer affections from the grateful children, who honour the crown of glory on the hoary head. Alas, that such an honoured old age can ever be contrasted with an old age of impenitence and impiety. But the page of honest truth declares, “the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.” Every man ripens according to his own true character. There is no tendency in advancing years to transform, but only to develope and mature the man. The tastes, sympathies, and habits of good and bad men grow more and more apart as they increase in years. No sights on earth present a more appalling contrast than that between the maturity of evil and the maturity of good. Just imagine that Moses in his early years had chosen Egypt rather than Israel: had despised the covenant whose seal he bore: had become the oppressor rather than the deliverer of his people: had reversed all those scenes of zeal for God and faith in his promises and obedience to his law; and had then been called after six-score years of unbelief and growing impiety to yield up his unhappy

and unwilling soul! The great charm in the death of Moses is his true piety. But this same charm consecrated his early manhood, and sanctified the intervening years. The matured piety of this man of God was the growth of years in the Lord's service. They who covet this peculiar distinction, to die in God's fear, must live in God's service.

But, 2d, among the privileges that marked the death of Moses, we may rank the definite preparations he was permitted to make for his departure.

Perhaps it is not always desirable to anticipate our departure from earth: and ordinarily men die without direct anticipations that this event is near. Yet every man has matters to settle that are important to him and to others: and in the exposures of health and reason and life to which we all are constantly subject, every man should in some way make known to his friends, his wishes in regard to the things he must leave behind him. And he, who knowingly approaches the grave, should diligently employ his remaining time in completing works which he may finish, and in preparing counsels which will be prized by his kindred and friends after he has gone. Such preparations marked the later days of the life of Moses.

Among his latest acts, the Jewish leader, by God's express command, punished the iniquity of the Midianites and the Moabites, by whose wickedness the people of Israel had been led into great evil. Under the instruction of the covetous Balaam

and with many pretences of friendship, they seduced them to participate in the licentious worship of Baal-Peor. The lawgiver punished this apostasy in Israel with severity: and the special indignation of Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, to punish the bold and unblushing iniquity of one of the princes of the tribe of Simeon, met with the special approval of the Lord, and secured for him and for his seed the promise of the continued priesthood. A war then sprang up between Israel and these tribes, in which Moses vindicated the right and punished their covetousness and licentiousness.

Moses was also permitted before his death to effect the settlement of two and a half of the tribes in the territories already secured on the eastern side of the river Jordan. The tribes of Reuben and Gad, having many cattle, and perceiving that these lands were fitted for their use, desired permission to settle there. At first Moses reproved them for apparently wishing to flinch from the wars in which their brethren must still engage: but if this was their original meaning, they still readily agreed to leave their families and flocks under the care of those among them, that were not fully fitted for active war; and to go with the hosts of Israel to the conquest of Canaan. Together therefore with part of the tribe of Manasseh they were settled in these lands, though their exact boundaries were not pointed out until afterwards.

It was further the distinguished privilege of

Moses to make preparation for his death and for his subsequent influence, by the words he addressed to the people in view of that event. The entire book of Deuteronomy, as the name it now bears imports, is a rehearsal of the law of God, made by the lawgiver in the land of Moab, in the last year of his life: and he finished it, and uttered his final song in their hearing on the self-same day that he received the Lord's command to ascend the mountain to die. xxxii. 48. Besides this repetition of the law, in which he brings forward the most important teachings of the past forty years, and which he accompanied by appeals and exhortations; and besides the song just referred to, he pronounced a series of blessings upon the tribes after the manner of the dying Jacob; and warned them solemnly of evils that threatened them in the future by some of the most remarkable prophecies that are anywhere recorded in the Bible. These final teachings of this wise and affectionate leader stand unsurpassed for kindness and sagacity; and are well worthy of the latter days of a Moses. Above, ii. xxiii.

It was a further privilege granted to Moses that he was allowed to know and to install into office, by the laying on of his hands, Deut. xxxiv. 9, his successor as the leader of Israel. This man had long been the faithful and tried friend of Moses; and the commander of the armies of Israel since the first conflict with Amalek. Having accompanied Moses when he went up into the mount, and

received with Caleb the Divine approval of their faithfulness, he was worthy of the distinction. And it is likely that after Moses, Joshua was now the oldest man in the camp. When the lawgiver must lay down his charge, it was a great comfort to leave the people he loved, in the hands of one whom he knew so well and so favourably.

A 3d privilege granted to Moses before his death was the sight of the land of promise he was not to enter.

We cannot help sympathizing with this great and good man in his disappointment, that after so many longings and such painful wanderings, he could not pass over Jordan into Canaan. Yet indeed this is the common lot of man. Our cup of blessings is never full: many of our earthly desires remain ungratified. But next to the privilege of entering the desired land, is the opportunity of seeing it: and this he had. He was permitted to ascend Mount Nebo, and the Lord showed him that goodly land which he had promised so long before to Abraham and his seed. It is difficult to say how much of the land spread out before the gaze of the prophet as he stood on Nebo, and looked on every side upon those coveted scenes. It is well known, from the representations of travellers, that the great transparency of the atmosphere* in Judea and other eastern lands, enables persons to see with the naked eye to a distance that is quite

*The Land and the Book, i. 17, 18. Mem. of Stoddard, 348.

incredible to the inexperienced. Yet we do not know just where Moses stood to command the widest view of Palestine.* But to see that land at all, even if his vision fell far short of the entire territories, was a great gratification. So many hopes had centered there; blessings so large were there promised to his people; perhaps visions of that great Prophet, who "in the fulness of time" should tread Judea's plains, so crowded upon the mind of Moses, that he esteemed it a high privilege to be allowed to gaze upon these scenes.

Nor can we doubt that the undimmed eye of Moses turned with great interest upon the nearer side of Jordan, that he might see upon the plains of Moab his well-beloved people. The camp which he had been accustomed to command, the tribes whom he had led, were there before him. They had watched his receding form as he passed upward alone: even now the tide of grief for his departure had begun to swell in the tents of Israel; a more impressive scene had thus occurred than when the high priest had gone up to Mount Hor; and to him the furled standards and the motionless hosts were equally visible with the holy tabernacle and the overhanging cloud. Yet from all these scenes the lawgiver must soon turn away. This was the last of earth: his time had come to die.

* Owing to the difficulty of exploring the eastern side of the Jordan, the site of the mountain is unknown at present. Smith's Dictionary, ii. 432.

4. The manner of the death and burial of the Jewish lawgiver shows the great favour of God towards him.

Death came upon him in his full vigour, yet fully aware of its approach. What a strange thing death ever is; but especially how strange it seems that a man may be one moment in life and hope, and the next moment, gone—insensible, dead! Now he is a man in full health; with manly strength; in blooming beauty; the next moment, with no violence upon him, with no marring of his frame, the limbs are powerless, the senses gone, the body lifeless, and the soul in the eternal world. The Jews have a tradition respecting the death of Moses that God took him away with a kiss; which they found upon the terms of the record. “He died at the word of the Lord,” literally rendered is, “at the mouth of the Lord.” Perhaps Dr. Watts makes reference to this tradition, when, in his lyric poems, he thus speaks of this final scene of Moses’ life:

“Softly his fainting head he lay,
Upon his Maker’s breast;
His Maker kissed his soul away,
And laid his flesh to rest.
In God’s own hand he left the breath
That God’s own Spirit gave;
His was the noblest road to death,
And his the sweetest grave.”

Many a man has died alone as Moses did; and yet all unlike Moses. Many have received no

burial rites at the hands of their fellows: they have been buried by the falling leaves of the forest, or by the shifting sands of the desert; or by the tossing billows of the sea. But of none but Moses have we this record in such a sense that *God buried him*. This may have been by the ministry of angels. Angels dug the grave, bore the bier, laid the venerable form to rest, and marked the spot, sacred to them, but unknown to man. Yet sad as earthly funerals are, it was not so in the case of Moses. Not a tear was dropped, not a sigh was heaved, not a grief was felt in a funeral service where angels were the attendants. They do not think as we do of such an event. They did not lose, but gain a friend that happy day. What was death to earth was birth to heaven; and Moses left man to become the fellow and the companion of angels. Even the body of Moses they could lay in its secret grave with the calm assurance that one day it should rise, more venerable and more glorious than ever, and dwell with God, its eye undimmed and its force, far beyond the earthly nature, unabated for ever.

Many conjectures have been made to account for the burial of Moses in an unknown spot. The most common thought is that this was done to prevent the Israelites from paying a superstitious veneration to the grave, especially to the relics of Moses. And truly if the worship of relics, in any sense, is right, no man more than Moses ever

deserved such veneration. Yet while it is true that the sacred Scriptures never give countenance, here or elsewhere, to any such superstitions, nor to any idolatry: it is also true that the Israelites were but little inclined to pay such regard to the dead. The graves of the patriarchs, Abraham and his children, were among them; but they never exhibited any tendency to relic reverence. Their religious habits made the touch of a dead body a defilement; and they were little likely to pass to the other extreme, and consider a dead man's bones as specially sacred. The secrecy observed respecting the burial-place of the great lawgiver seems the more mysterious, from several passages in the New Testament. We read that, at the transfiguration of Christ, two persons appeared with him in glory. These were Moses and Elijah. With these three names, we have seen, the miracles of the Scriptures are chiefly associated. Above, i. 160. And when Christ ascended up, after his resurrection, two men stood by the disciples in shining garments. These, an eminent American scholar conjectures, were also Moses and Elijah.* We think we can more easily imagine how Elijah appeared; for his body never passed into the grave. But with what body did Moses appear in glory? What is the meaning of that dark verse in the epistle of Jude, which informs us that a contest occurred between Satan and the archangel Michael about the body of

* See Alexander on Acts, i. 10.

Moses? (ver. 9.) Unlike Enoch and Elijah, Moses died. Some have thought that as Satan has power over death, (Heb. ii. 14,) Michael wished to raise the body of Moses as redeemed dust, and Satan resisted this as contrary to Divine justice. Others that Satan wished to discover the hidden spot, and the archangel resisted him.

But whatever things we may not understand, this much we may know, that the sleeping dust of God's saints is watched over, not only by angels, but by the Lord of angels. This is a comfort to us. We carefully lay the bodies of departed friends in an allotted place: * erect above them a proof of our affection: and cultivate the grounds reserved for burial purposes. But we cannot maintain long our watch over them. Our occasional visits will soon be succeeded by our taking up our own abode with them in their silent city: and our watching shall be done. And some of our friends we did not help to bury: some had no friendly hand by them to smooth their pillow or prepare their last abode. Perhaps they sleep beneath the waters of the China sea. But God buried them as

*The Hebrews ever *buried* their dead. *Burning* is sometimes spoken of, as of Saul and his sons, 1 Sam. xxxi. 12; but even then burial followed: and the burning usually referred to spices and not to the corpse, as 2 Chron. xvi. 14, &c.: perhaps even Amos vi. 10. But see Henderson Min. Pr. 165. The Jews quote Gen. iii. 19 to justify burial; and Sir T. Browne in his "Urn-burial" says, "God himself, that buried but one, was pleased to make choice of this way."

he buried Moses; and he knows their resting spot, if man does not. And every saint may lie down without fear that harm shall come to his sleeping dust, lie where it may. Angels waft the departing believer home: angels guard his tomb: the Lord of angels keeps him.

“God, my Redeemer, lives,
And often from the skies,
Looks down and watches all my dust,
'Till he shall bid it rise.”

We do not know how Moses appeared in glory on the mount of transfiguration. We know too little of the invisible world to settle this matter, though we cannot think that his body was raised from the grave before that, because the Scriptures expressly teach that Christ was the first fruits of them that slept. But we know that the day is coming when the bodies of all the saints shall be raised from their graves, known or unknown, and shall be changed into glistening forms like those that appeared on Mount Tabor.

“Arrayed in glorious grace
Shall these vile bodies shine,
And every shape and every face,
Look heavenly and divine.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CHARACTER OF MOSES.

"This was earth's noblest statesman,
Well worthy of a crown;
A warrior brave, a prophet true,
A poet of renown;
And never earth's philosopher
Traced with his golden pen
On deathless page, truths half so sage,
As he wrote down for men."

THE more faithfully we study the life and character of Moses, the more fully may we agree to rank him among the great men of the world. It seems indeed humiliating to reflect that among the numerous millions, who dwell upon the earth in each succeeding generation, so very few are remembered at all; and that still fewer are held in grateful and favourable memory by their fellow-men. A man in the earth is like a drop of water in the ocean, so small a part is he of this great whole: and in our hours of despondent feeling we almost conclude that little value attaches to what we are and do. When we die who will miss us? Who will be the better or the worse for our existence?

“I shall sink
As sinks a stranger in the crowded streets
Of busy London: some short bustle's caused,
A few inquiries; and the crowd close in,
And all's forgotten.”

A few names make up the roll of the truly great in the world's history: it would be impossible to name one in each five centuries whose fame is, even nearly, universal. And leaving now out of view the ONE NAME above every name, Phil. ii. 9, of ineffable glory in earth and heaven, no man deserves to stand higher in human esteem than this man, Moses. And the excellency of his character is all the greater for this; that a true estimate of him will serve to correct the unhappy influences which so often spring from despondent views of what we are and what we do. There is a sense in which it is well enough for us to feel our insignificance: and yet we are not truly wise unless we also know that neither we, nor any act or word or thought of ours, can be insignificant. We should learn of Moses, that a man's true greatness consists not in fame, nor in influence, but in goodness. There have been men of influence in the world: men through whose genius and power revolutions have occurred, and lasting results have been produced; men whose praises have been sounded by the unthinking generations, and who have borne in history the name of great: and yet theirs have not been lives of real value to themselves, or to their race. We may learn of these men; even the worst

of them may teach us lessons: but we ought not to imitate their example, nor to adopt the principles upon which they lived. And there is this wide distinction between the greatness of the usual heroes of history and the greatness of Moses, that the world's greatness is usually beyond the reach of common men, while the true greatness he exemplifies, lies near at hand for the humblest person. Few men have the capacity to be the conquerors of the world: still fewer men have favourable opportunities to exert such capacities: the crowns of the earth are for a few heads among the multitudes: and the opportunities for great deeds occur but seldom. But it is not so with the very best characteristics of Moses. He is exalted, as other great men are, for great deeds; and we may wisely remember these and learn of them. But Moses teaches us that man's highest excellence is in the moral character; and that every great thing shines more gloriously when adorned by the light of virtue. And this same light may exalt and adorn the humblest life; and no life can be insignificant that is thus adorned. The wisdom, the power, the length of life, the lasting fame, the wide spread influence of Moses, may be quite beyond the reach of our earnest strivings: but this is the highest character that Moses ever bore, that he was the servant of the Lord: that he sought to know and to do his will: desired his favour: and now dwells in his presence. We may all attain to this high

distinction. The same God not only lives, but calls us to his service: teaches us the same law which Moses obeyed: and assures us that we may possess, through our humble service to him, the same glorious immortality. And indeed to embrace this service is our only escape from the despondent feelings, which may well weigh down our efforts for earthly distinction. If we should be prosperous and great in the world's esteem, how small a matter will all this soon seem! Riches we may gather about us, but we cannot hold them long: honours may bloom upon our brows, but how soon they fade: and the praises of mere fame are all unheard by the dull ear of death. But the prospects that are only the better and firmer as they look forward to immortality: the peace with God that will only be the more profound as it becomes eternal and unchanging; the blessedness of God's service for ever: these are matters that dignify every soul to whom they belong. We cannot be insignificant beings, if we are gifted with immortality: and if this immortality which belongs to every soul must be spent in the full enjoyment of God, or beneath his wrath due for our sins against him, then is it a concern of infinite importance that every soul should seek the chief eminence of Moses, and become, as he was, a servant of the Lord.

Now in a brief resumé of the character of Moses we may speak,

I. Of his greatness in the estimate which even the world may place upon him.

Judged by an earthly standard, by the dignity and force of his character, by the extent of his attainments, by the great things he did, by the things which he left undone as truly indicative of greatness, and by the influence he has exerted upon all succeeding generations, Moses was a great man. Considered in his influence upon the world, his name ranks among the most important in human annals. As a writer, he stands first in the order of time. No books are as ancient as his; and no other writer sustains more various or difficult characters. No history has ever been written that can be compared with the histories of Moses. From him we have our only authentic and intelligible records of the earlier periods of human history; and he is truly the great historian of the world. And there are literary excellencies in these earliest books that have never yet been surpassed by the tongue or pen of man. Dignity, candour, directness and perspicuity are manifest characteristics of his style; pathos affects our hearts in the touching story of Joseph: eloquence melts us in the simple oration of Judah: argument convinces us in the valedictory he addressed to Israel on the plains of Moab: and a noble poem is his closing song. We have already spoken of Moses as a lawgiver: of the excellency of the laws that are written in

his books: and of their moulding influence upon the jurisprudence of even modern states. We may add to this that the history of the world has never afforded a higher model of a statesman and a patriot. We have seen that he was the founder of the Jewish nationality; and that the institutions given by him endured without change through the long period of fifteen centuries. But nowhere, either out of the Bible or in it, can such a patriot be found. Every inducement, even those of education in Egyptian principles and tender gratitude for Egyptian kindness, as well as the offer of Egyptian honours and ease and wealth in contrast with their opposites, would bear upon the mind of the youthful Moses to make him forgetful of that tie of nature which bound him to the tribes of Jacob. And, short of Divine teachings, Divine impulses, and Divine aid, it seemed hopeless to look for Israel's deliverance through any means within his reach. If any man is ever justified in despairing of his people; and therefore in attempting no duties of patriotism, Moses might have despaired. But he seems the patriot, not only in venturing back to Egypt, in resisting the oppressor's power, and in leading forth that great multitude; but in every crisis of trial and difficulty arising from the provocations and rebellions of an ignorant and fickle people, he was equal to every emergency, and he displayed a moral heroism that has never been surpassed.

No traces of personal ambition can be pointed out in all the long career of Moses. Whether the intimation be true or false in Josephus, that he refused the Egyptian crown to join himself to the Israelites, such a refusal would be entirely consistent with the similar refusals of later days. God himself, angry at the wickedness of Israel, proposed to destroy them and to make of Moses a still greater people. An ambitious man would have accepted the offer. "Surely a crown divinely offered may be lawfully accepted, if any may!" would have been the reasoning of many a mind. But Moses loved his people. And in true zeal for the Divine honour, and in a true affection for his nation, he plead that they might be spared: he remained their teacher and their leader, but he neither became himself their king, nor attempted to transmit a single honour in the line of his descendants. What a lesson to rulers and statesmen have we in the history of Moses, that they should lose all sight of private and personal ends, and seek only the welfare of their people. How affecting it is to read, that his public prayers were granted and the public sins forgiven at his request: but that his last earnest request for himself and for the pardon of a single offence was denied; and he, who had led the people forward to Canaan, could not himself enter the wished-for land.

The successful issue of all the undertakings of Moses may lead us to form an exalted estimate

of the man. We agree indeed that this success was through the Divine blessing upon him: that we cannot comprehend these things at all, except as we affirm the Divine commission of Moses: and that such Divine leadings have never else been granted to any people. And yet it is evident that when God uses a human instrumentality he uses it *as such*: and accordingly we find even Moses a sinner against God, and for his sin excluded from Canaan. If therefore we blame Moses for his sin, we are also to commend him for his virtues, in the same sense that now we commend a virtuous man. The influence of a Divine commission and of Divine inspiration, is not such as to interfere with the accountability of the man. Inspired men evidently used their natural faculties; and however truthful their inspired utterances in the name of the Lord always were, the very fact that their conduct was sometimes blameworthy, (see Gal. ii. 11,) shows that many things were left to be done by them in the use of the same principles and with the same freedom with other men. The character of Moses is as rightful a study as if he had not been a prophet: and his long and unvarying success in spite of reverses and disappointments, and for so great a work, must serve to rank him among the extraordinary men of the world.

But there is an element of greatness in the character of Moses for which the world does not look in its heroes; and which yet is the most

important and essential thing in a just estimate of his character, aspirations, deeds, and influence.

II. The piety of Moses is the true foundation of his greatness.

Take this single thing away, and the majestic fabric of his greatness would crumble down to dust. Moses was great, because he was good. And this is the chief matter, we have before intimated, for our interest: not only because this is the chief element of an abiding greatness: but because this especially makes Moses an example for the humblest of those who learn of him. His laws may help us to judge of human laws, though we may not be law-makers: his policy may enable us to judge of statesmanship, though we may not be rulers. But of his piety we may be the imitators: for the same God rules us, the same law binds us, the same gospel calls us; we are immortal as he was, and in the footsteps of his faith, it is wisdom for us to walk.

We are taught in these sacred writings to ascribe the origin and the progress of piety in the heart of any man to the grace of God. This teaching is as plain in the books of Moses as in any later part of the Bible: and it is as true of himself, as of any believer in any age. In all the long list of redeemed sinners which we might here make out, no man, not even Paul, could say with more truth than Moses, "By the grace of God, I am what I am." Men are often placed in circumstances unfavourable to the formation of a religious char-

acter: and but few godly parents could have faith to believe that a child borne from them into the home of idolatry, should become a lover of truth and piety. The grace of God met Moses in circumstances as unlikely as we can well imagine. We will not attempt to trace the workings of renewing grace to form his soul for God. We have said, in earlier chapters, that simple but excellent means were used to train the child in the faith of Israel. But in his case, as indeed in our usual views of piety, we are able to discern the working of God's Holy Spirit only by the actual results in the man's experience. The first thing we are able to point out in the piety of Moses is worthy of the imitation of every immortal soul. Moses made a decided choice of piety. No man in his generation that knew him and knew his course, could have the slightest hesitation in acknowledging the sincerity and the earnestness of the man, who left Egypt's honours for Israel's afflictions. And though circumstances may differ for us, and the contrast may not be so wide between our earlier and a Christian character, every man ought to make a choice of piety, its teachings, its engagements, its friends, its separations, and its joys, so that no doubts could reach the minds of beholders, no misgivings trouble himself, in deciding where his heart is. The example of Moses is resplendent here! "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

We do not need to trace the motives by which he was influenced: it is possible that while pondering the subject his mind wavered, drawn sometimes one way and sometimes another: but in the result of a steadfast decision for truth and God, we should feel the deepest interest. This is the turning point in the earthly, indeed in the immortal life of Moses. The issue of his decision was momentous truly! Yet just the same substantial duty is urged upon every conscience: and there is no more important thing we have to do than to make a decided choice of piety. Happy is the man who so fears and relies upon God as to form the steadfast purpose to serve and honour him. Nowhere more than in religion is a cheerful, resolute, decided, purpose, a just test of character.

It is quite remarkable that in few of the Scriptural examples of piety do we find record of the early exercises of a religious experience. The work of the law upon the heart, awakening the conscience, calling forth penitential tears, and leading the sinner to earnest prayer, is not distinctly recognized at the conversion of men, especially in the Old Testament believers; and very briefly even in the case of Saul of Tarsus. Yet this omission is not because these earlier experiences were not felt, nor because they are of slight importance. It is rather perhaps because, as we learn a man's character, not by inquiring into his childhood's training, but rather by ascertaining

what principles he holds now; so we can gain in the later views of believers a better knowledge of what they really were. We know that Moses and David and Paul did recognize the excellence of God's holy law, and the grace of his salvation: did exercise penitence and faith and love: did ask and receive forgiveness: did possess a decided religious experience; and where we can discern these proofs of the workings of God's transforming Spirit in them, or in any other man, we esteem it a question of minor importance to decide, how or when, came these things about.

The question of piety in Moses is easily settled by marking his traits of character; and by noticing the working out of his religious principles in duties towards God and man. In every age, "by their fruits ye shall know" men.

Moses was a man of great humility. So natural are the tendencies of the human heart to pride, that even Paul needed a "thorn in the flesh," lest by his abundant revelations he should be exalted above measure. But no man that ever lived had greater incentives to pride than had Moses, during the entire period of his recorded life. The forty years spent in Midian may have been a period of humiliation; but of this time we know but little. Certainly few men could be brought up as Moses was in the court of Pharaoh without great temptations to pride: and his whole career from his return to Egypt until his death; was a series of most wonder-

ful exaltations. Such a man the world never saw. What wonders were wrought by him in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness: what words of authority and grace and kindness flowed from his lips and from his pen: what skill, what honour, what success had he as the people's deliverer: what favoured opportunities of intercourse with God, what dignity, as a prophet, what influence as a mediator before the Lord. And yet through all these abundant and exalted honours, how truly does a single line express the humility of this man of God: "Moses knew not that his face shone." Doubtless the nearer men live to God, the less room there is for pride. Judging upon earthly principles, Moses could not have been humble. But earthly principles are false here. In every case, pride is a proof of carnality: and we may seriously ponder that constant teaching of the Bible, that the Lord himself dwells in the humble heart.

Moses was a man of eminent meekness. Though humility and meekness are kindred virtues they are not the same. Meekness is the endurance of provocations with a becoming temper. Therefore humility may fill the hearts of angels and glorified spirits: but, as they can meet with no provocations in heaven, there is no room for meekness. If we would understand the meekness of Moses, we must consider the provocations offered to him by a rebellious people: and contrast these with his disinterested zeal for their welfare. And

if it is true that their wickedness did once provoke even Moses to speak unadvisedly with his lips, it but sets his unparalleled meekness in a more remarkable light to say, that with so heavy a charge upon him, we find but one instance of sinful anger in a lifetime of six-score years! Perhaps one such case was needful to prove that not through apathy was Moses so calm in trials; that his natural temper could be aroused; and that the influence of sanctifying grace made him of so equable a temperament through so many trials.

The courage of Moses was of the highest kind. It was not the mere prompting of physical nature: it was the calm boldness that discerned the path of duty, and never hesitated to advance in it. It was sometimes shown in the face of an excited people, for there is no reason to judge that he ever faltered in any of the trying emergencies which he had to meet. In Egypt, he feared not Pharaoh: at the Red Sea he feared not the swelling floods: at Sinai he boldly attacked the idolaters in the height of their services: and sublimely mingling meekness and courage, he calmly stood his ground even when the people spake of stoning him. And while thus fearless before man, he added, at this very juncture, a higher proof of courage by his boldness in standing for them before God. A timid man would have sought Divine protection against the violence of the people. The courageous Moses saw that the rebels were in danger from the

displeasure of God: and instead of finding his refuge in this, he boldly throws himself in the breach for their protection. How elevated was that holy courage that ventured, for a rebellious people's sake, to hold back the threatening hand of God!

But we will not delay to mark the various excellencies that might be named in the character of this servant of the Lord. We will not describe his remarkable disinterestedness: nor attempt to exhibit his unwavering faith: nor enlarge upon the wonderful symmetry and completeness of his character. Three other things we may notice, that this brief sketch of what he was, may not be too incomplete.

Contrary to the thoughts which men often entertain of him, Moses was a man of warm affections. We picture him to ourselves as a stern old man, uncompromising in his views of duty, unrelenting in his declarations of vengeance. Let us judge righteously of him. Moses was a lawgiver. It is necessary that law should speak of duty: enjoin it: and know no rule but right. A lawgiver must speak of crimes: must denounce them: must speak the stern penalties they deserve. But in all this there is neither injustice nor cruelty. As a lawgiver, Moses must speak terror to the transgressor. Jesus Christ does so, in tones no less decided. If Moses speaks of death without mercy: the slighted blood of Jesus declares yet sorer punish-

ment. Heb. x. 28, 29. But let us not forget that the moral law on Sinai was prefaced by appealing to the memory of God's kindness—"I brought thee out of the land of Egypt:" and that upon the interpretation of Moses and Christ and Paul, the fulfilling of the entire law was LOVE. See Deut. vi. 5, Mark xii. 30, 31, Rom. xiii. 10. Moses had a high sense of justice: but righteousness and love are not antagonistic. The reverse is true. The exercise of mercy and forbearance is no great attainment, except when the grossness of the injury is clearly seen. It is the highest honour of Moses, as a man of warm and true love for his people, that we never once find him apologizing for their sins; and yet we always find him praying for their forgiveness. Moses loved Israel: and no man of all their history better deserved their love and veneration in return.

Moses was a man of devotional habits. We have not failed to notice the fervency and the efficacy of his prayers upon various occasions. And if it seems an exalted privilege indeed that God would allow him to stand before him in his tabernacle, and commune with him as a friend; let us not forget that in our age of the church, every believer has access free to the mercy seat: that he has opened up for us a new and living way: and that our advantages are comparable to the access which Moses had to God. Doubtless but for the privilege of gaining new strength from God, this

holy man had often fainted by the way: and vigour for himself and help for Israel, he found by crying unto the Lord. It is our wisdom to consider Moses as an example of a praying man: and if we learn of him, we will be bold and believing, even when God seems to frown: we will be persevering and prevalent, even when God seems to refuse.

Fidelity to every trust reposed in him, is the last excellency we will now notice in the character of Moses. What a testimony is that which the later Scriptures bear upon this point: Moses was faithful in all his house as a servant. Never in all the history of the world did any man have a more difficult and trying task: and it was not for a brief season that Moses faithfully discharged these duties. Perplexities beset him; discouragements assailed him; opposition sprang up from unexpected quarters; and they hindered, who should have helped. What constant anxieties for forty years; what burdens of care for so great a people; what a multiplicity of thoughts for even his ordinary duties; what self-control, what energy, what decision, what prompt wisdom for the extraordinary calls of that tumultuous and wayward multitude; what wearing toils without a respite. And in all God's house Moses was faithful. Ingratitude met him, but he swerved not a line from his proper path. Injustice reproached him: and he reviled not again. Disappointment met him. Hardest and last of all, even his God refused his

prayer, and would not let him pass over Jordan: and this last bitter dreg in his earthly cup he drank without a murmur; and then calmly addressed himself to renewed faithfulness for the remnant of his earthly work. And never was he more faithful than after this great disappointment of his life. If we may distinguish at all between one time and another in a life of such fidelity, it seems just to say, that Moses never appears greater than in the closing scenes of his life, just after his prayer was denied. How faithful he still is to every duty, though so deeply grieved that he could not enter Canaan. If we did not know that this life-long aspiration had been breathed in vain, we surely could not learn it from any change of tone in the instructions now given to the people, nor from any failing of his devotional spirit in his last song. Well may it be written of this man of God, that “Moses was faithful in all his house as a servant.”

What a different history would belong to the race of man, if the chief actors in other lands and other times, had been as truly worthy of our esteem as this greatest man of Jewish history. We would not need to change their national or individual peculiarities: for each man might live and act, not like another, but like himself. The world is too prone to worship heroes, to exalt intellectual power, to honour large success: and all this with but little regard to the ends that are reached.

But what a blessing to themselves and to the eternal interests of millions, if the restless Alexander, instead of pouring the armies of Greece over the eastern world, had gone forth like Paul to win the bloodless, beneficent victories of the gospel: or if Napoleon had banded all Europe together to crown King Jesus, Lord of all! What perversion of the gifts which God has given, has marked the vast majority of those whose names are known in history. The warriors of selfishness and ambition, the poets of pride and restless vanity, the skeptical historians, philosophers, and metaphysicians are those who have secured the world's brightest honours. And the generations of men, following such leaders, have held in light esteem the highest attainments to which men can aspire.

Herein lies, we may again declare, the chief excellency of the character of Moses: that after just such excellency we may all aspire: that circumstances may vary with every age and with every man, but so do not change the terms upon which God smiles, and the duties which he calls us to discharge: and that long after we have each passed away from the earth, the blessings of piety may be ours for everlasting ages. The earthly life of Moses was one hundred and twenty years: but already has he enjoyed three and thirty centuries of communion yet closer with God; and the dawn of that eternal life is but begun. Here is a path of glory which we all should earnestly pursue.

Follow the example of Moses, and you shall reap the eternal rewards of the faithful servant of God. First become a servant of God. Make the cheerful, decided, instant choice of piety: not with halting hesitation as between two opinions: but so that neither yourself nor any other can doubt just where you belong. You need give yourself no special anxiety respecting the sphere of life you fill or are to fill. Moses was an humble shepherd for forty years. Let God take care of your position: and let your chief concern be for character. Believe as Moses did: choose as he did: rise above self and seek the good of the church and the glory of God: be humble before him and patient of injuries: draw near to his footstool in humble devotion: and faithfully do the work he bids you do. God will take care of your comforts, of your reputation, of your influence, of your soul, if you follow in the footsteps of faith. And the greatest joy that the heart of man can bear, will swell in his bosom, who hears from the final Judge the happy benediction, Well done, good and faithful servant.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CHRIST GREATER THAN MOSES.

AMONG the predictions uttered by Moses none is more remarkable than that in which he foretells that God would raise up to his people from among their brethren a prophet like unto himself. There have been different methods of understanding this prophecy. That it finds its fulfilment in our Lord Jesus Christ seems evident: that it was designed to speak of him, appears to be claimed by the New Testament writers. Acts iii. 22. The whole passage is taken together by some, and considered as general rather than particular. *First*, God forbids his people to hearken to soothsayers like the other nations: for *next*, he assures them that he will raise them up a prophet, *i. e.* a succession of prophets, far more worthy of their regard. This was the view of Origen: the later Jewish expositors hold it: and it is adopted by Hengstenberg, though apparently with considerable hesitation.* Other Jewish commentators have conjectured that a single prophet, as Joshua or Jeremiah, is here meant; yet

* Christology, i. 67-73.

can they not agree upon the name of the person referred to, nor upon the proofs that the passage thus finds its fulfilment. Others, among whom rank the respectable names of Calvin and Henry and Scott, admit the general sense of the prediction to a class of prophets; but affirm also its particular application to Christ, as the great Prophet of the church.

Yet we greatly prefer the interpretation which understands this passage as directly declaring the coming and dignity of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Jews understood it to refer to the Messiah before his actual coming: and some of them gathered from it that this prophet should be superior to Moses. This Abarbinel remembers when he says, “He shall be exalted above Abraham, lifted up above Moses, and higher than the angels of the ministry.”* And puerile as the cabalistic interpretations of the Jews appear to us, yet they prove the meaning put upon this passage. The verse, they remark, begins and ends with the letter *Nun*, in Hebrew signifying fifty: importing “that to the prophet here promised should be open the fifty gates of knowledge, forty-nine of which only, were open to Moses.” And the verse consists of ten words, signifying that this prophet must be obeyed no less than the ten commandments.† And in the records of the New Testament it is plain that the mass of the Jewish nation, together with the Samari-

* Bishop Patrick’s Commentary.

† Patrick.

tans, looked for a single prophet to fulfil these words of Moses. And as Christ himself declares that Moses wrote of him: as he explained the predictions of Moses concerning himself: and as the apostles appeal to Mosaic testimony, we may regard this passage, surely applicable to none so truly as to our Lord, as designed to have express regard to the great Messiah.

The two greatest names unquestionably in the church of God are Moses and Christ. And they are harmonious names, whatever points of difference we may mark. They belong in the same house: their principles of righteousness are alike: they are prophets of the same faith. To follow Christ is not to give up Moses: rather, Christ says, "If ye had believed Moses, ye would have believed me." But that we may see the true relations they bear to each other, we may consider how it is that Christ is a prophet like to Moses; and then, the superiority of Christ over Moses.

Moses was like to Christ, because both these prophets were raised up from among their brethren. Not only was the Messiah truly a man, but he was of the stock of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, and a lineal and legal descendant of David the king.

Moses was like Christ in many of the events of his personal history. An interesting parallel is made by Dr. Thomas Scott in his commentary, between the lives of these two: from which we may

glean a few of the more important particulars. Both were born in the reign of a persecuting tyrant, were exposed to violence in their infancy, and were providentially saved while many other infants perished. Both rejected the honours and glories of this world, preferring affliction with the people of God. Matt. iv. 8-11, Heb. xi. 24. Both were rejected by the people whose redemption they afterwards accomplished. Acts vii. 25. If the face of Moses shone from intercourse with God, the whole person of Christ and his very clothing were radiant with glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. And they were much alike in the stupendous miracles wrought by them. We may speak again of their characteristic differences: we may simply now say, that their wondrous works were, in many things, like each other. Moses divided the Red Sea, Christ walked upon the waters and calmed them by his word: Moses fed the people with manna, Christ gave food to multitudes by means of a few barley loaves; Moses gave them water from the rock, but the rock itself was typical of Christ, and he spoke of living water to his humble hearers.*

We might further declare of Moses that he was like Christ because of the eminent graces of his character: for his meekness, and disinterestedness, his love for his people, and his zeal and untiring industry in duty, his communing with God and his

*See Eusebius and Jortin, in Newton on the Prophecies, Dis. vi.

interceding prayers, indeed the almost faultless symmetry of his character, bring him nearer the likeness of Christ than any other prophet of the church. And we might add that different as they are—Moses giving the law and Christ bringing the gospel—they are alike faithful in their place. They stand not in array against each other. Christ accepts the work of Moses as complete: makes no attempt to change in any way the law already given: but declares its unalterable excellence and its permanent authority. If likeness denotes harmony of aim, principle, and influence, Christ is a prophet like to Moses.

Moses was like Christ in that he alone of all the other prophets was a mediator between God and the people. God spoke face to face with Moses to grant him Divine communications as he did not to any other prophet: the people expressly desired him to stand between them and God: and Moses stood alone over the entire church in the wilderness as no other prophet ever did. God himself drew a contrast between an ordinary prophet and Moses, who was faithful *in all his house*, (Num. xii. 7,) seeming to ascribe to him an authority over the church not given to other men. Moses stands alone. During his lifetime he had no peer, and till the Messiah came no complete successor. He united in his own person the various offices of leader, deliverer, mediator, lawgiver, teacher, ruler and judge.

But great as Moses was, he was greatly inferior to Christ. "Now this man,"—says the apostle, of Christ—"was counted worthy of more glory than Moses." In all things, according to the tenor of both the Old and New Testaments, Christ has the preëminence.

Christ is superior to Moses in the dignity of his person. Moses was a mere man, eminent in various respects; yet only of the race of Adam. Therefore he was but a servant in the house of God. But Christ was the Son of God. His existence did not begin with his birth as the child of Bethlehem; but at his coming into the world the very angels worshipped him as their well-known Lord. It is not needful for us to recount the proofs of dignity in Christ. The epistle to the Hebrews begins with an elaborate argument upon this very topic. It sets forth in the plainest terms his exalted character as the Son of God; the brightness of the Divine glory: of the same essential nature: the maker, upholder, possessor of the universe; the Lord of angels; receiving their homage: holding a sceptre and a throne of righteousness, immutable and eternal: and receiving honours never given to any inferior being. Then the apostle passes on, in the second chapter, after a few words of practical application, to declare that this Eternal Son, the partaker of every attribute of the Godhead, became a man, partaker of our flesh and blood. He then holds up this wonderful Mediator, God and man in

one person, for our contemplation, in direct comparison with Moses. Moses was faithful in the house of God: yet this man is as much more excellent than Moses as the builder of a house has greater dignity than the house. This language bids us consider Moses as but a part of the house: Christ as the builder. Moses was a creature; Christ was the creator.

There is nothing more important in reference to Christ than the recognition of his Divine dignity of person: for this is the rock upon which rests the entire fabric of the church: this the grand justification of all the preëminent honours and duties ascribed to him. The whole tenor of the sacred writings sustains the consistent teaching that he is thus divine. The extraordinary fact that “to him gave all the prophets witness:” that they all, from the days of Adam, predicted his coming, sets him wholly above all others in the house of God.

It is not needful to dwell upon the superiority of Christ to Moses, as to their respective virtues. Christ alone could be unreproved for sin, John viii. 46; he was “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.” We may recognize the virtues of Moses: yet in Jesus dwelt every grace that belongs to piety, every excellency that can adorn humanity, the fulness of wisdom and knowledge, and such utterances of truth that the world confesses with the Jewish officers, “Never man spake like this man!”

In office Christ is counted worthy of more glory than Moses. We might indeed say that in a singular manner the chief offices ascribed to Christ were held by Moses. If Christ is a prophet, Moses was a prophet. If Christ is a priest, Moses so far acted in this capacity as to anoint Aaron for the priesthood and to offer intercessions before God. If Christ is a king, Moses ruled over Israel and is even called king in Jeshurun. Deut. xxxiii. 5. If Christ is mediator, so we have seen that Moses also was. And Moses wrought miracles of stupendous majesty. Yet in all these things Christ is more glorious than Moses. As a prophet, his are clearer and final teachings, comparable to the words of Moses as the noonday splendour of the sun to the dawn of the day star. As a king, his right is, as the Son of God, to sit upon his everlasting throne and to subdue all things to himself. The miracles of Christ are far more glorious than those of Moses. The wonders of Moses were terrible. He scourged Egypt: filled the land with lamentation: and drowned their hosts in the Red Sea. But the miracles of the Son of God were all beneficent. The deaf heard; the blind saw; the sick were healed, and the dead restored to life. In every work, Moses was the servant of the Lord. But the devils acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God: his own authority cleansed the leper by the simple, "I will:" and his successors wrought their miracles in the name of Jesus. In their nature and in the

power resident in himself, his were more excellent. Perhaps a careful comparison of the distinct places occupied by them severally; Moses chiefly proclaiming the law and effecting the preparatory duties of the church, and Christ bringing the gospel of love and peace and effecting what the law could not do; would explain and vindicate the differences between their respective miracles. Both would thus seem appropriate to the end in view: yet in all respects his wondrous works prove that Christ has more glory than Moses.

In his capacity as the Mediator between God and man, Christ is more glorious than Moses. It is true, as already noticed, that Moses was a mediator: standing between the people and God, hearing the law for them and speaking it to them. Yet so exalted are the duties of Christ as Mediator, that he is spoken of under this title as if no other than he could be named. “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.” This preëminent Mediator partakes of the natures of the two parties at variance; and so, as Dr. Waterland judiciously observes, he is a Mediator *by nature* as well as Mediator *in office*. And the great excellency of Christ’s mediationship lies in this, that he is the efficacious Redeemer and Saviour of his people. It seems a very remarkable fact, in the history of man’s religious views, that no other person, except the Lord Jesus Christ, has ever claimed to be a Saviour

for man in any such sense as recognizes the righteous claims of God's holy law, or the difficulty of reconciling the mercy shown towards sinners with the truth and justice of God demanding that his law should be honoured. That the same principles of righteousness are implied in the earlier Scriptures, and taught in the sacrificial offerings of all ages, and demanded by the yearnings of many an awakened conscience, may indeed be true: but the clear declaration of these things may be found only in the gospel of Christ. The law of sacrifice had declared, ever since the fall, that without the shedding of blood there could be no remission: yet every enlightened conscience would detect the incongruity between shedding a creature's blood, and the pardoning of man's iniquity; and would agree in the conclusion, "It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin." So Paul says that God declares his righteousness in the forgiving of sins by setting forth his own Son to be a propitiation.

The Evangelist tells us that the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Perhaps he means that Moses foreshadowed in his Levitical law the grace of the gospel: but that true grace—the reality of grace, as contrasted with the promise of it, or the shadow of it—came by Jesus Christ. In this case the meaning would agree with the teaching of Paul that the "law had a shadow of good things to come and not the very image

of the things.'" Salvation was preached in the days of Moses, by the institutions of Moses, and long before his day: but none of his ordinances had any efficacy to secure it. Whatever virtue there was in them, depended upon their connection with Christ. Him they foreshadowed, promised, exhibited: it was of his salvation that the prophets spoke, when they testified beforehand the sufferings of the Messiah and the glory that should follow. Moses would have been of no value, for man's salvation, had not Christ followed him.

The entire doctrine of redemption by the blood of Christ as taught in the Scriptures is the proof of Christ's superiority in the house of God. The necessity for an atonement: the inherent excellency of the sacrifice of Calvary: the peculiar qualifications he must needs possess as our surety; the efficacy of his blood, at once to satisfy Divine justice and to give true peace of conscience to the defiled worshipper, are all proofs of Christ's preëminence. The work he was called to do, was in its own nature separated from all other service ever rendered to the church of God. To use Paul's strong language, Christ is the builder of the house, while Moses merely served in the house. While then the Jewish people were lawfully subject to Moses: and while all later ages ought to believe his teachings, yet our faith is to be called forth towards Christ in a higher and more important sense than towards any other prophet. We believe them: we believe

on him. There is a dependence upon him personally, and upon the promises he makes, and upon the work he has done, that is quite peculiar. While this has especial reference to the death of Christ, yet an intelligent faith in his offering upon the cross implies all his other excellencies.

The death of Christ is the most important study set before us in the Bible. It was studied in its typical promises on every bleeding altar long before the age of Moses. But especially does the New Testament writings make his cross the central figure for our thoughts. Christ died for us. We need not contrast his death with the death of Moses: for in no sense can we say that Moses died for his people. And if other prophets and righteous men have died as martyrs to their principles, and have built up the church of God by the shedding of their blood; yet they all stood in a position entirely separate from that occupied by Christ. What emphasis does the apostle lay upon his words when he asks, "Was Paul crucified for you?" The death of Christ was the death of a Surety, who offered his blood a ransom. He only in all the church of God bears the name of our Redeemer. The faith we repose in him is far more than the reception of his words as true. We commit into his hands our eternal interests; we repose upon him with unshaken confidence as the Rock of Ages: we are justified before God, because he has wrought for us an everlasting righteousness.

These sacred writings do not present us with any matter which it is more important for us to understand than the teachings they give us concerning Christ: and their teachings concerning him cannot be far misunderstood when we get just conceptions concerning his death. That death owes all its importance to the inherent dignity of his person. It is CHRIST that died. Substitute any other name, and, if it were possible to allow all the other conditions to remain the same, the whole value of the gospel disappears. Even substitute Gabriel for Christ: and our hopes are lost. Gabriel could not take the place of sinners, nor bear our load of guilt: nor save our souls from wrath. But in the Son of God dwelt every needed ability to save to the uttermost. What infinite wisdom and power and grace have undertaken to accomplish cannot possibly fail. He alone is worthy to take the high position of a Mediator between God and man; in him we may repose our trust with entire assurance. So his apostles say, "He that believeth on him shall not be confounded." 1 Pet. ii. 6. And in so saying, they but reiterate the earlier teachings of the prophets. Is. xxviii. 16.

The superiority of Moses over other prophets lies of course in this, that he possesses honours and discharges duties which belong not to them. Let us not then think it strange when so great superiority is ascribed to Christ Jesus, if he occupies a place, new and unheard of else in the uni-

verse of God; and one for which no analogies do, or can exist. The substitution of a righteous person for the guilty is not only a rare occurrence in the government of God; but this is the only perfect case of its occurrence. Christ Jesus stands alone. There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved. We do not call his intervention an ordinary mode of proceeding. Rather it is in every respect extraordinary, peculiar, single. It is enough for us to know that such a work as that of Christ Jesus was needful for man's salvation: and that in its arrangement and execution every end of righteousness was embraced and secured. And we may regard him as only the more worthy of honour, because he alone could be man's Redeemer: and his salvation as demanding our faith more imperatively, because we must embrace it or perish; and the wisdom and grace and righteousness of God as but the more exalted, because these are all so illustriously displayed in the salvation of ruined men through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

It is now and shall for ever be the glory of Christ that he stands alone: and that the very songs of eternity shall declare, "Thou art worthy, for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." Rev. v. 9. We cannot, we desire not, to compare any other in the universe with this PRE-EMINENT ONE. Col. i. 18. Him alone hath God set forth to be a propitiation through faith in

his blood, Rom. iii. 25: of him and of his death could he accept: the coming and entire work of this Mediator were devised by Divine wisdom. And if God has set forth his Son to be a propitiation: if this has been manifestly the Divine plan, according to the testimony of revealed teachings in all the prophets, and of appointed worship in all ages of the church, and even of the praises of glorified men in heaven: if the express design of all this is to declare the righteousness of God in the remission of sins, we may certainly anticipate that every needful qualification for his great work would dwell in him.

The offering up of Jesus Christ upon the cross, to satisfy Divine justice and reconcile us to God, was an intelligent, deliberate, and voluntary sacrifice. He who was in glory with the Father before the world was; in whom dwelt all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, well understood the righteous claims of the law, the depths of human degradation, and the sorrows he must bear, before he could bring redemption: and through no sudden and ill-considered impulse did he offer to stand in the dreadful breach. He voluntarily and cheerfully, and with a full understanding of all the humiliation and suffering and shame it involved, undertook this peculiar work. “I delight to do thy will, O my God!” Well may the poet say,

“This was compassion like a God,
That though the Saviour knew,

The price of pardon was his blood,
His pity ne'er withdrew."

The very undertaking of such a work upon his part puts the highest honour upon the law of God. It is a very common thing for criminals who suffer under the penalties of law, to complain that they deserve not their sufferings, or that the penalty they endure is too severe. And if in this case, the Son of God had exclaimed against the sorrows he endured as undue or too severe, it would have been greatly to the dishonour of the law. But on the contrary, not only the very fact of his voluntary and uncomplaining sufferings, but his frequent and cordial approval of all the claims of the Divine law, give honour to that law, broken by man. To honour the law in his own person by a cordial and perfect obedience: to enable him to bear the penalty which it had declared against transgressors, were among the important reasons which led him to assume our human nature and to be himself "made under the law." No more perfect declaration of the excellency and righteousness of the law could be made, than may be found in the work and words of Christ. He magnifies and honours the law as expressing the spotless righteousness of God. More gloriously than even Moses the lawgiver, does Christ maintain and prove and vindicate the righteousness of God. "Think not that I am come to subvert the law; I am not come to subvert, but to satisfy: for verily I say unto you, heaven and

earth shall sooner perish than one iota or tittle of the law shall perish without attaining its end.”* Very true indeed, the great work of Christ is not the literal carrying out of the law; it is not law, but gospel; not justice, but grace; yet indeed the righteousness of God is even more illustrious as seen in this atoning work. For if mercy could not be shown to sinning men save through the satisfaction of Calvary: and if it was not possible that the cup should pass away from the lips of pleading innocence, while he stood in the stead of the guilty, there cannot possibly be stronger proof than is thus afforded that the God who shows such unbounded mercy can still “by no means clear the guilty.”

All this, as we have repeatedly intimated, implies the infinite personal worth of this accepted propitiation. This is the vindication and the proof of Christ’s singular preëminence: that no created being could take this place. It was fitting that our Redeemer should be a man: yet needful that an infinite superiority above man should also be his. He should be of a worth that incomparably transcends the sinners in whose place he stood. Moreover his ability to do this great thing must be so perfect that he himself sustains no permanent injury by its full accomplishment. How wonderfully this is true we may learn from his own remarkable words, “No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself: I have power to

* Matt. v. 18. Dr. Campbell’s version, quoted by R. Hall, i. 274.

·lay it down and I have power to take it again."

John x. 17, 18.

Christ Jesus then stands alone in the house of God. Not even Moses, much less any other, may compare with him. The words of Paul may be urged with the widest signification, that in all things HE has the preëminence. If we but take these revelations of Divine wisdom for our guide, it is impossible to exalt too much the dignity and character, the grace and love, the power and work of Jesus Christ. No voice of warning comes forth from the throne of a jealous God bidding us beware of idolatry here; but the rather, we are commanded to honour the Son even as we honour the Father. John v. 23. Happy are they to whom is made known this great mystery of godliness, the salvation of men through the incarnation and death of God's own Son.

And in recognizing how superior Christ is to Moses in dignity of person, in clearness of teaching, in the peculiarity of his great work, and in the love which he exhibits, we may understand why the gospel denounces upon the unbeliever, more fearful vengeance than did the law of Moses. Heb. x. 28, 29. Awful as were the threatening clouds of Sinai, the darkness of Calvary will be more dreadful to those who fall beneath "the wrath of the Lamb." Rev. vi. 16.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

***THE INHERENT CREDIBILITY OF THE WRITINGS
OF MOSES.***

IT is a matter of great interest that the ordinary readers of the Bible should have within their reach some good evidence of its authenticity and authority. As Moses lived so long ago, and as even the most learned men can find no writings of so ancient a date: as few men have the time, means, taste, or capacity for a learned investigation of historical proofs, it seems important that we should have some brief process of argument, that may be satisfactory to an intelligent and candid mind, for establishing the truthfulness of these sacred writings. Let any man, who has the time and opportunity, go through the full inquiry which proves that the Bible is the word of God. All the evidences will be found harmonious with each other. But a just satisfaction may be reached by a much shorter process. Sometimes it may be by the very truths themselves that are here made known: sometimes by the personal experience of a pious mind in which the Holy Spirit bears a testimony which neither earth nor hell can shake. And sometimes

the very circumstances in which these writers were placed, may be thought to show the truthfulness of their teachings. In these very writings we have proofs of their authority. Only one fact we take for granted: that the earlier books of the Bible have been given to the world by the Jewish people. This fact nobody denies. The original language of the Old Testament, in general, is the Hebrew: the Greek translation is acknowledged to be over two thousand years old: the Jews, now scattered all over the earth, still reverence these books in the original Hebrew: and no people have ever so carefully guarded their books, as they have the Old Testament Scriptures. Simply claiming this fact, as the basis of proof, that the Jews have given the Old Testament to the world, we think this single truth involves the Divine authority of these writings.

I. Every one who carefully reads these writings must readily acknowledge that the Jewish people, in whose possession they were, had a very deep interest in settling the question, Did God indeed speak by Moses? For, the laws which are given in his books, claiming to come from God, descend to the most minute matters of personal and domestic life, and rise to the control of spiritual and eternal interests. These laws were expensive and even burdensome, so that one of the apostles of Christ declares, "Neither we nor our fathers were able to bear them." Acts xv. 10. These books record

their national history; establish their civil and ecclesiastical government; regulate their social habits; declare the tenure of their real estate; and appoint the bounds of their tribes. Their laws, their usages, their commerce, their wars and their religion, were all regulated by them. Yet these laws, suddenly adopted by them, were maintained without a single change so long as they remained a nation. No people ever so long retained the same laws as the Jewish people held those given by their first lawgiver. Whatever changes they made at any time—except the establishment of a kingdom which left other laws unchanged—were made by introducing corrupt practices, and not by altering the laws given by Moses.

It is not possible that the Jews would receive these laws from Moses, nor that they would so long retain them unchanged, unless they were convinced that he was Divinely commissioned to give them. Every nation has its memory of early important events that cannot be wholly false; and which must be true in every case where a written record, made at the time, is retained among them as the proof of these things. No man can question the truth of those events in English and American history that are confirmed by Magna Charta, and by the Declaration of Independence. There can be no material misrepresentation in the records of national interest, written and generally received; especially when they involve important changes in national

forms, usages, and character, and distinguish a people for many ages. Men do not let such things pass without discussion. We cannot but see that the Jewish people had a deep interest in knowing whether God did indeed speak by Moses. If he did not, then they would have been as restless as other people under such a code of laws; and they would have refused to maintain them so long, or to guard with so jealous care against any corruption of the books in which his teachings were written.

II. Not only were the Jews deeply interested in these events of national history, but they had every opportunity of knowing whether these things were true or not. The nature of the facts, miraculous and historical, here narrated, is such; and the manner of keeping them constantly in the public view is so remarkable, that it is impossible that the Jewish people could have been deceived in regard to these things. Either these things occurred, or they did not occur: and the Jews knew very well whether they did or did not. If we speak of the things that happened in the days of Moses, surely they are wonderful enough to attract attention, and they occurred in the most public manner possible. No nation ever had so clear evidence for its national recollections as the Jewish. When the American Declaration of Independence was signed, not one man in ten thousand of those living at the time, witnessed the signing. Yet millions, then and since, believe it was signed, and credit its words as

authentic. But the whole body of the Jewish people saw, and, in an important sense, took part in, the great events of the times of Moses. In the ten plagues of Egypt, they saw how their oppressors suffered: and they could not be mistaken in attributing these plagues to the wrath of Jehovah. It was even more remarkable when there was no hail or darkness in Goshen, and when *they* did *not* lose their first-born: But just notice the wonders which all Israel saw. The Red Sea divided, the people passed safely through, and their enemies were drowned. The pillar of fire and cloud was in the view of every eye to direct their journey. The manna fell every ordinary morning to supply every household with food, and yet was as miraculously omitted with every Sabbath. On Sinai's darkened summit God spake to the trembling people a law, that is itself as wonderful as the means of its proclamation. But we need not dwell upon all the particulars which all Israel saw.

From the days of Moses onwards the history of Israel was so peculiar and so connected, that the people were all witnesses to the truth of the records they have handed down. That after the death of Moses his great power passed peaceably into the hands of Joshua; that they passed the Jordan as they had passed the Red Sea; that they took Jericho and overthrew thirty kings in Canaan, and divided their cities and lands among the tribes without a single quarrel in the distribution of such

immense spoils; that the nation rose to the dignity of a great and powerful kingdom in the days of David; erected a splendid and costly temple by the hands of his son, whose fame was so great for riches and wisdom: and divided into two kingdoms in the reign of his successor; that they degenerated into idolatry so as to need the reforming efforts of Elijah; that the ten tribes were carried away and lost; that the Jews were taken to Babylon for seventy years: and that they returned and rebuilt their temple: these all are remarkable events in their history through all these books. No people could be mistaken in facts like these: no nation ever had things so remarkable in their history: and their very strangeness prevents all possibility of mistake. Nor should we forget that the connection of these things with their religion made them both more important and better known. These events of history were repeated in the ears of the people from age to age in their religious songs and religious instructions. The Psalms lxxviii., cv., cvi., and the speech of Stephen, Acts vii., are examples of reciting these truths as well known matters of history: as the American people have been wont to read the Declaration of Independence publicly every fourth of July. Interwoven thus with sacred things, and with constant religious teachings, no occurrences of national history were ever more generally known, more fully substantiated, or more universally believed, by any people than these things

were by the Jewish people. We must give up national peculiarities, national remembrances, and all that depends upon past history, if we conceive it possible that the Jews were imposed upon, in these things. They are all plain matters: the witnesses, comprising the entire body of the Jewish people from age to age, knew very well the truth; nor could their successors be deceived when the titles to their lands, the very frame-work of society, and their entire religion depended upon events so important and so connected together.

III. As we cannot believe that the Jews were deceived in regard to these things, so there is as little reason to allege that they had any motive or wish to deceive others. The absurdity of judging that they had any design of imposing upon the credulity of the world by their sacred writings, may easily appear, if we consider the character the Jews have always borne; and if we compare these writings with any other writings of national history.

It is well known that the Jews never were a proselyting people, and are not to this day; but the very contrary. Some of the Roman satirists, especially Juvenal, seem to imply a proselyting spirit among the Jews: but Juvenal lived after the dawn of the Christian era; and evidently confounded Judaism and Christianity. The Jews, so far from obtruding their books and their religion upon the nations, held the Gentiles in great contempt. With the solitary exception of Jonah, a

most unwilling missionary, we do not read of a single prophet of the Jewish church, sent to preach repentance to the nations around. They did indeed admit of proselytes; but they did not seek them. So great were the prejudices of the Jews against seeking converts among other nations, that they opposed Christianity more bitterly because it sought to evangelize the world; the early Christians were themselves divided by conflicting views respecting the free admission of Gentile converts; and even the apostles of Christ were very slow to understand that they must preach Jesus to the heathen. Scarcely any supposition is more absurd than the idea that the Jews designed to impose their religion upon the world. These books were peculiarly Jewish: it was death for any Gentile foot to intrude into their temple: and Jewish bigotry declared, on the one hand, that no uncircumcised man could ever be lost; and on the other, that the doom of all other men was uncleanness and perdition.

But reasons in another direction make this supposition scarcely less absurd. When any man or nation would impose upon another it must be with something creditable to those who make the attempt. But if we compare the Jewish writings with the Jewish character and history, we cannot believe that anything short of the truth would ever lead them to consent to publish these as their national records. Truth may lead men to declare

even grievous things; but falsehood always flows from some supposed advantage. A court of justice receives the confession of a crime as evidence against a prisoner, for he speaks to his own disadvantage; but it will not credit his protestations of innocence so as to discharge him. It is quite remarkable that the Jewish people firmly testify to the Old Testament writings; but these writings testify as no other national records have ever done. National records usually breathe the prevailing spirit of the nation from which they spring. But there are several things in the Jewish Bible that are peculiar, and which lead us to judge that these books would never have been so reverenced by them, unless they are fully true.

We can discern in these books no tones of flattery to soothe and propitiate national pride. In all other nations, national events and the biographies of their eminent men are narrated with great partiality: national characteristics are highly coloured: necessary censure is sparingly bestowed: praise is lavished freely: a favourable aspect is put upon all national affairs: and every historian shows a bias in favour of his own people. It is not so in the records of the Jews. These writings are wonderfully impartial; and censures are freely uttered against their best men and their best times. Moses never praises his people. He declares that God chose them and led them, for no worthiness of theirs; he calls them a rebellious and stiff-necked race: he

proves his charges by recording their follies and murmurings, their rebellions and wickedness in the desert; and he gives no palliating words of apology. And this is the style of all the Scriptural writers. From first to last the sins and follies of the people and of every eminent man, are as plainly recorded as their virtues. No other records of national history speak as these do: and the Jews did not cherish these writings because they flattered them.

In all other nations the tone of their books accords with the spirit that pervades the nation itself. It was far otherwise with the Jewish people. The Old Testament is a book of acknowledged national authority; yet rarely, if ever, did the mass of the nation hold the spirit of these writings. They claimed to be the disciples of Moses and highly reverenced him; yet they never had the true spirit of Moses. During his lifetime they constantly murmured and rebelled against him: and afterwards, the prevailing tendency of the people was towards apostasy. And so it is with the Jewish people to this very day. They cherish the memory of Moses: they reverence the Old Testament Scriptures: yet they have never had the spirit of Moses and the prophets. The pious part of the people seldom or never swelled into a majority: wickedness often controlled the nation: yet never did they reject formally the authority of these writings. What strange anomalies do we see in their history! As a people they were prone to

idolatry; yet they cherished a book which strictly forbade idolatry. They neglected the appointed Sabbath; yet they clung to a book that upheld it. They indulged in licentiousness; yet no laws had ever more sternly denounced impurity. The Jews did not adopt and cherish the Bible, because its spirit corresponded with the national spirit.

It is further remarkable that there never was a party among the Jewish people denouncing these records as imperfect, partial, or unjust. In other historical records and narratives, there are varying accounts: and the colourings of party prejudice can easily be seen in the various writers. In reading history we are usually obliged to know the historian, so that we can make due allowance for the bias of his preconceived views. An impartial historian is a rare character: and a nation of readers who venture no dissent from the freely expressed censures of a plain historian, is rarer still! Yet the Jews confess the impartiality and truthfulness of the plainest histories ever written. Nor is this because that among a peaceful people they never had tumults and strifes of party. On the contrary these abounded. Even Moses was not the leader of Israel by unanimous consent; and the succeeding prophets were not caressed and popular in their respective ages. Various rebellions and murmurings arose against the authority of Moses; party spirit, in his lifetime, was more than once put down by the stern judgments of God: it was character-

istic of the prophets to be maltreated and put to death, so that Jerusalem was proverbially the tomb of righteous men: the very dividing of the people into two kingdoms must have intensified their internal dissensions: and the Jewish people were always restless and turbulent. It was not in the absence of party feeling, nor from love to the prophets, nor through attachment to their sentiments; it must have been through conviction of the truth of these records, that the Jewish nation cherished the memory of these sacred writers, and adopted their writings as the history of their people.

The Jewish Bible differs from all other national records in this further remarkable thing, that it contains predictions of the future. Not content with recording the events of their own times as historians, these writers claim an intelligence more than mortal; look forward to the events of the distant future; and claim our confidence in their truthfulness by declaring things which only the favour of God could reveal to them. And there is a double argument that may be founded upon these predictions of the Jewish prophets. *First*, If long afterwards we find their words fulfilled, we cannot resist the conclusion that they spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. But this is not the thought we now urge: nor shall we further compare their numerous prophecies with their striking fulfilment. ch. xxiii. But *secondly* there is that in the very burden of these prophecies which would forbid

the Jewish people to receive these prophets, except upon the clearest proof of their authority. Flattering prophecies men are willing to hear: censuring prophets are esteemed croakers of evil. Human nature says of them, as Ahab said of Micaiah, "I hate him: for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." 1 Kings xxii. 8. If we look at the prophetic contents of these writings, we may find that the Jews had as little reason to cherish the prophecies as the records. Their national vanity is no more flattered by the prophets than by the historians. Many precious promises are indeed made to encourage their faithfulness to the covenant of God. Yet the teachings of their prophets make a roll of "lamentation and mourning and woe" and disgrace for the Jewish people. And now in the wide dispersion of their unhappy race, the Jews everywhere possess in the writings of Moses his explicit declaration, more than three thousand years old, of woes upon his people, grievous and long-continued. He could not have foretold these things from any observation of the sufferings of any other people. For the wonderful griefs of the Jewish people have no parallel in the annals of humanity. For eighteen centuries the Jews cherished the writings of Moses though foretelling so many miseries to themselves: and for eighteen centuries longer, after those miseries began their amazing fulfilment, they still retain these writings in their hands, acknowledging their au-

thority, while as little willing as before to renounce the sins whose judgments they feel.

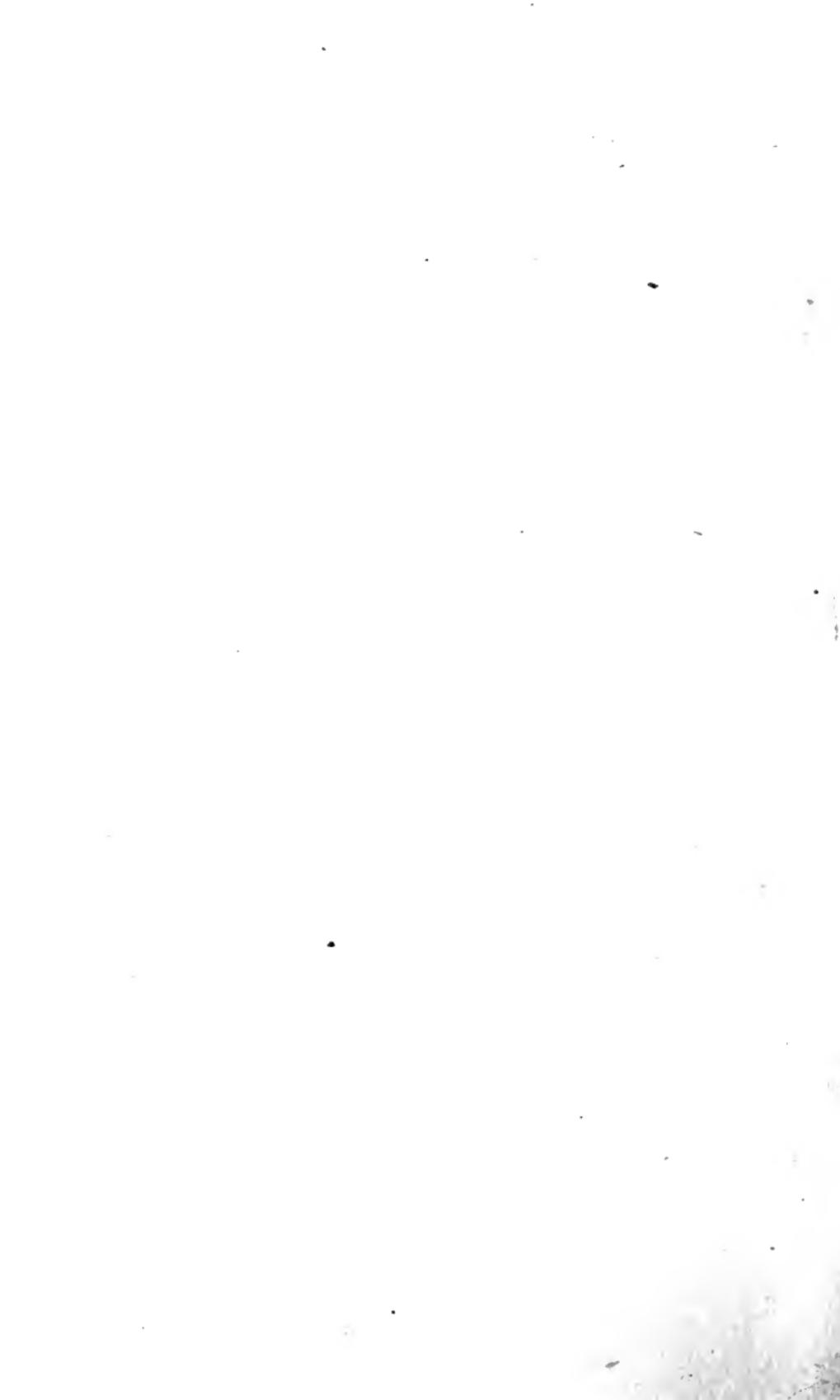
The predictions of Moses and the later prophets concerning the Messiah are remarkable proofs of prophetic authority, not simply in their fulfilment but in their very doctrines. These teachings evidently did not spring from Jewish aspirations; but from Divine inspiration contrary to the prevailing tone of national feeling. The Jews do not now, and never did, truly sympathize with the teachings of their own prophets. They acknowledge now, the authority of these writings, though they teach principles and facts which that people thoroughly hate, and which they endeavour to pervert from their plain meaning. The Divine nature of the Messiah, the doctrine of his expiatory death, his rejection by his own people, the casting off of the Jewish people, and the ingathering of the Gentile nations: these all are plain teachings of the Jewish Scriptures. Yet the Jews never have believed these things: they do not now believe them: while they have reverenced the books in which they are taught as of Divine authority. If written anywhere else than in their own prophets, they would reject them promptly. But they claim, "We are the disciples of Moses," though they never have truly adopted his principles nor shown his spirit.

This remarkable position of the Jewish people towards their sacred books cannot be accounted for, except by believing in the full credibility of these

historians. Or if the proof thus furnished is not conclusive in itself, it is in a remarkable degree confirmatory of the evidences of revealed religion: and it is such an argument as falsehood could never bring forward to sustain its most plausible claims. This great people had at stake the deepest interest in the truth of these ancient writings: the facts here recorded were at once so strange and so plain that there is scarcely a possibility of error: and in the entire absence of all efforts to deceive the world, there is an absence as total of all motives to receive themselves these teachings, except as they were true. That the Jews have received and cherished the Old Testament writings can only be accounted for, by recognizing their truth.

There is something truly great in the calm simplicity of all the Scriptural writers. Moses is the first in order, and the latest writer, fifteen centuries later, is in entire harmony with him, though the least in the kingdom of heaven has advantages superior to the older prophets. In all, every principle is righteous; every implication consistent; every influence holy: and the glory of God and the good of man as their common aim, sufficiently vindicates that no evil men planned these great teachings.









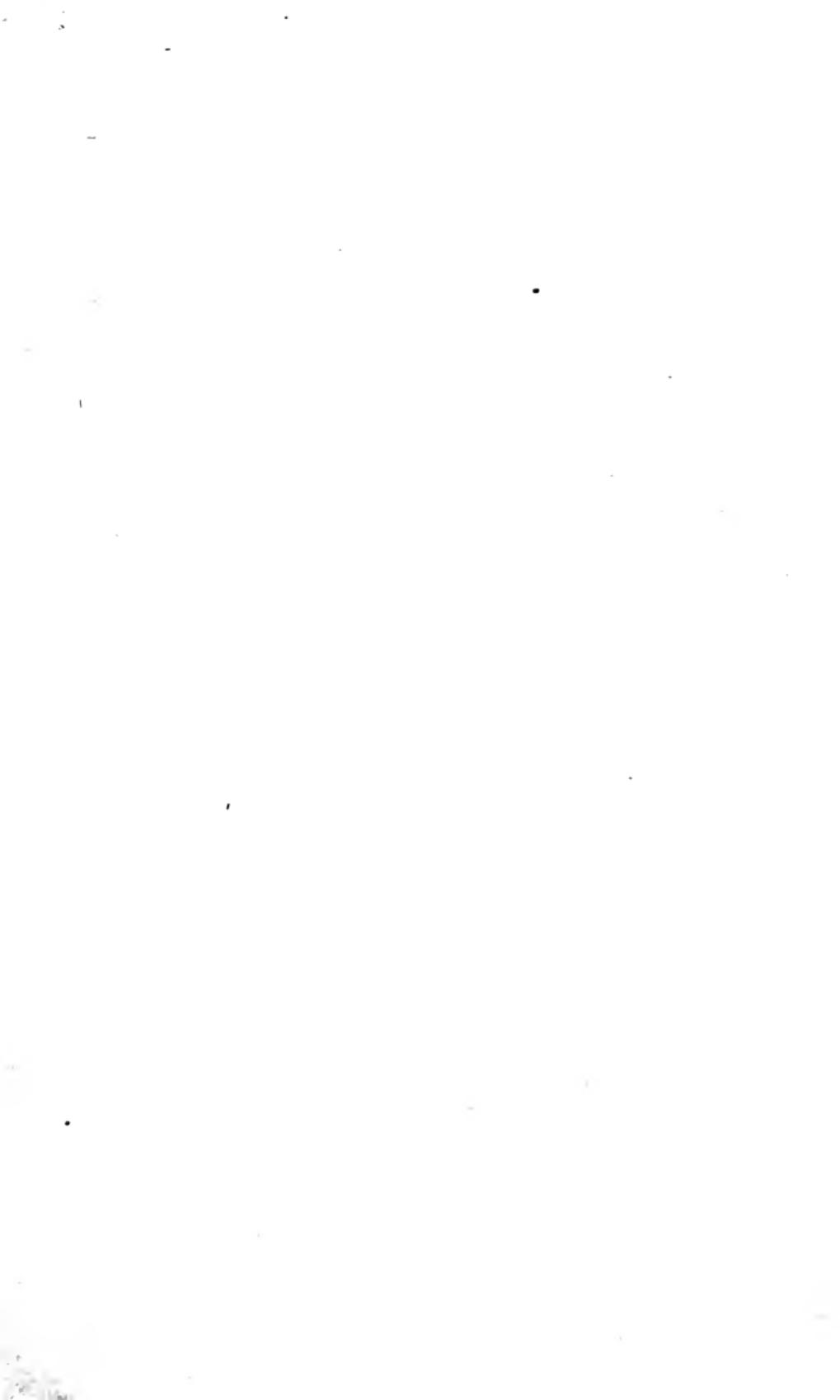


Date Due

卷 9

卷之三





BS580 .M6L9 v.2
The Hebrew lawgiver.

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 00033 6885